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# THE CREED OF CHRIST

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## CHAPTER I—The Sayings of Christ

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**W**HAT did Christ believe about the world in which he found himself? What conception did he form of its origin, its meaning, its destiny? To which of its aspects did he ascribe supreme reality, to which of its forces supreme power, to which of its interests supreme importance, to which of its ends supreme worth? In other words, what solution did he give of the master problem which confronted him as it confronts each one of us—the eternal riddle of the Sphinx—a problem the solution of which, whatever outward form it may assume, always descends, in its attempts to win vital expression for itself, into the minutest details of human action? Or, to speak more generally, what were the fundamental ideas that dominated Christ's

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thought, that influenced his will, and that shaped his life?

It is time that we who call ourselves Christians should begin to ask ourselves these questions. For nineteen centuries we have steadily averted our eyes from them. What has interested us hitherto has been not what Christ believed about God and Man and the Universe, but what we ought to believe about the personal relation of Christ to God and Man and the Universe. Yet until the former problem has received a provisional solution, what meaning can we see in the latter? For how can we dissociate the personality of Christ from what must needs have been of the very essence of it,—his philosophy and his creed? Perhaps it is because we have either neglected to study Christ's beliefs, or else studied them within the narrow and arbitrary limits prescribed by dogmatic theology, that our speculations as to his personality have been so fantastic and so futile. For not only have we confined our study of Christ's personality, largely if not wholly, to an elaborate scrutiny of what is intrinsically inscrutable, but even in that illusive field of

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inquiry we have accepted as final conclusions which were formulated by the over-subtle Greek intellect (prone even in its prime to 'mistake words for things) in the darkest days of its protracted decadence, and have subordinated to those conclusions our own speculative efforts in the same and in kindred regions of thought. Lulled into fatal apathy by the narcotic of that pseudo-scientific teaching, the Western World has paid a superstitious reverence to the letter of what Christ is reported to have said, and has made no sustained attempt to interpret its spirit. It has accepted Christ as its guide and leader, and has opened its heart to the influence of his winning and commanding personality : but because it has persistently ignored his ideas, its acquaintance with his personality has been shallow and one-sided ; and great as has been its devotion to his person, it has but seldom held intercourse with his soul.

Before we can attempt to determine what Christ believed, we must ascertain, as far as may be possible, what he said. How is this to be done ? In the Gospels we find many sayings

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which are attributed to Christ. Which of these are genuine, and which spurious? This is a question which concerns the "layman" even more than the professional scholar. Textual criticism may indeed be able to tell us when and by whom the Gospels were written, and whether all the contents of a given Gospel are genuine, in the sense of really belonging to that Gospel, or not. But in order to distinguish, within the limits of what textual criticism has stamped as trustworthy, the real from the spurious sayings of Christ, we need a preliminary acquaintance with the mind and soul of Christ,—an acquaintance which scholarship cannot give us, but which it is open to any one who will free his mind from prejudices and foregone conclusions to endeavour to acquire. We need more than this; we need what scholarship, in the sense of historical research, can give us,—an insight into the nature of Christ's surroundings; but we need this first and foremost. Unless we can commune with Christ's soul, unless we can form a preliminary conception of the master ideas that inspired him, we cannot begin to handle the problem that confronts us and that bars the way, until

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we have succeeded in solving it, to further intercourse with Christ.

The problem is not so desperate as it may at first sight seem to be. Perhaps I have overstated its difficulty. For even if it be contended that a large majority of the reported sayings of Christ are of doubtful authenticity, and that one's estimate of these must needs be determined by the conception that one has formed (or inherited) of Christ's mind and character, it will surely be admitted that there is a residuum of sayings, the genuineness of which is virtually beyond dispute.

In the first place, there are the "unorthodox" sayings, those which are or seem to be subversive of the established beliefs about Christ. Nothing but the intrinsic genuineness of such sayings could have procured them admission into a narrative in which their presence must have been highly inconvenient for those who edited the narrative,—edited it (whether consciously or unconsciously matters little) by the light of the theological assumptions which their general interpretation of it had helped to generate. Sayings of this kind are, as might be expected, few and brief. Among the most

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important of them are Christ's rebuke of the lawyer who had addressed him as "Good Master": "Why callest thou me good? none is good save one, even God," and the cry on the cross: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

In the second place, there are the sayings that are antagonistic to the general trend of belief and thought in Christ's own time. That such sayings should have been invented by those who told the story of Christ's life is in the highest degree unlikely. For the followers of a great reformer are always much nearer than their master to the spiritual standpoint of the age in which they live; besides, on their own showing, the disciples of Christ were strongly Jewish in their beliefs and hopes. Among the most important of the sayings of this class are the denunciations of the Pharisees, which fill so many pages in the synoptic Gospels, Pharisaism being, as we cannot too often remind ourselves, the high-water mark of the religious tendencies of post-exilian Judaism.

In the third place, there are the sayings which were obviously unintelligible, either wholly or in part, to the authors of the Gospels. That



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the pupil should find it difficult to rise to the level of the Master's teaching, and should again and again fall far below it, is what we have every reason to expect. And so, when we find sayings recorded in the Gospels, the meaning of which, on the naïve admission of those who recorded them, was too wide and deep for their minds to grasp, we may fairly assume that those sayings embody the actual teaching of Christ. Such are the many utterances, never clearly comprehended by Christ's disciples, and in more than one case flagrantly misunderstood by them, about the "Kingdom of Heaven" and the "Kingdom of God."

If we accept these three classes of sayings as genuine, we shall provide ourselves with a "base" for our further advance into the unknown country which we seek to explore. For there are certain facts about Christ which shine out from the Gospel narratives (when every doubtful passage has been provisionally eliminated), and which are as clear to the most sceptical of critics as to the most orthodox of believers.

It is quite clear that Christ was a "prophet," in the widest sense of the word; that he was

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possessed with large and far-reaching ideas of a more or less revolutionary character, and that he was therefore, speaking generally, in revolt against the tendencies of the age in which, and the people among whom, he lived.

It is also quite clear that he lived in an intensely religious age and among an intensely religious people. The air that he breathed was heavily charged with religious beliefs,—beliefs as to man's duty towards God and his destiny at the hands of God, beliefs which were primarily national, but had also a wider scope and bearing, and which were held with extreme ardour and extreme tenacity. Those beliefs Christ did not share; on the contrary, they were entirely repugnant to him.

For, again, it is clear, perhaps clearer than anything else, that the religious consciousness of the Jews in that age found its fullest, truest, and most logical expression in Pharisaism, and that hatred of Pharisaism was one of the master passions of Christ's life.

Finally, and above all, it is clear that Christ believed with whole-hearted conviction in what he called the Kingdom of God, and that he meant by this something inward, spiritual,

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natural, and eternal, something diametrically opposite to that Messianic kingdom to the advent of which his contemporaries looked forward,—a kingdom which was conceived of as outward, visible, supernatural, and temporal.

With these facts to fall back upon, we shall be able to attempt the difficult task of criticizing and sifting the doubtful sayings of Christ. We already know enough about Christ and his contemporaries to be able to hazard conjectures as to the origin of some at least of the sayings which are recorded in the Gospels. The work of developing and elaborating one's conception of Christ will, of course, go hand-in-hand with the work of criticizing the Gospel narratives, each process in turn reacting upon and helping to limit and shape the other. Indeed, if we were disposed to be hypercritical, we might say that for a final estimate of the authenticity of the various *λόγια Χριστου* we must wait until we have formed a final estimate of the creed and character of Christ. In other words, we must wait for a day which will never come. Meanwhile—and, after all, it is with the initial and not with the final estimate of Christ and of the Gospels that we are now concerned—certain

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rough-and-ready rules for distinguishing the genuine from the spurious sayings of Christ are suggested to us by the conclusions which our brief study of the undoubtedly genuine sayings has enabled us to reach.

Whenever Christ is represented as giving his sanction, directly or indirectly, to beliefs with which the general trend of his teaching shows that he had no sympathy, it is but right, to say the least, that our suspicions should be awakened. For the earnest and enthusiastic, but unimaginative, men who revered Christ as their Master were the very men in whose hearts the religious beliefs from which Christ had turned away—beliefs which appealed strongly to all earnest and enthusiastic Jews in the post-exilian era—would be likely to find their most congenial soil. The story of the claim made by the sons of Zebedee to pre-eminence in Christ's kingdom shows clearly how incapable even the nearest and dearest of Christ's friends were of rising above the level of the prevailing "Messianic hope." What wonder then that such men, when recording (whether orally or in writing) the sayings of Christ, should have made him the exponent of their own dreams

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and fancies, or, at any rate, should have coloured his teaching with the very conceptions from which he was striving to liberate their minds?

Yet we are not to assume offhand that every saying which seems to fall below the level of Christ's highest convictions is necessarily spurious. Just because Christ was a prophet, the words that he used must never be taken literally. He who habitually "taught in parables" is the very last man to whom we are to go for "theological information" or any teaching of that kind. Every prophet is at heart half a poet; and poetry always expresses itself in metaphors and other figures of speech, lending its sanction to these just so far as they serve to communicate to the listener's mind some flash or gleam of its own inner meaning, but declining to guarantee their truth for any other purpose or in any other sense of the word.

Also, as the *raison d'être* of the prophet is to deliver to the world new and revolutionary ideas, and as for these there is no fitting medium of expression ready to his hand, there is nothing for him to do but to make use of current

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conceptions and current modes of thought, of beliefs which he has renounced in his heart, of arguments which he regards as futile, that through these he may meet his fellow men on ground of their own choosing, and there communicate to them the new ideas by which their cherished "orthodoxy" will eventually be discredited and overthrown. In doing this he runs the risk of seeming to countenance the very conceptions which he has come into the world to destroy. But the risk is worth taking ; and the dishonesty of his action is entirely on the surface. For just so far as the conceptions which he seeks to undermine are, as so often happens, perversions or misinterpretations of a vital truth, in making them subordinate to a new idea which is, in part at least, a reaffirmation of that vital truth, his mission is "not to destroy, but to fulfil ;" or, rather, in the very act of destroying he restores the erroneous conception to its pristine purity, he reveals it as it really is.

Then, again, it is quite conceivable that, though in his heart of hearts the prophet disowns the doctrines which his contemporaries regard as orthodox, on the surface of his mind

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he still retains some measure of respect for them. Every man must needs come under the influence of the beliefs, prejudices, and assumptions of the age in which he lives. The process of breaking with these is a more or less gradual one, and is perhaps never fully consummated. There is an epoch in the man's life during which he half accepts, half rejects them. Then one may witness the singular spectacle of current beliefs being used, in perfect good faith, as the means of expressing revolutionary ideas,—the very ideas by which the beliefs in question are doomed, sooner or later, to be either subverted or transformed.

We may say, then, that when words are put into Christ's mouth which express the exact opposite of what he truly believed, and which end, as it were, in themselves, the reporter has, wittingly or unwittingly, made Christ the mouthpiece of his own convictions; and we may assume that the words in question were never really spoken. But when the words, however foreign their literal meaning may be to Christ's way of looking at things, are made subservient to the purpose of communicating spiritual truth, we may at least admit the

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possibility of their having been used as they stand; and we may be quite sure that the deeper truth which is behind them and burns through them was in some form or other communicated by Christ to his disciples.

Let us test these rules by applying them to one or two specific cases. In the 13th chapter of St. Mark's Gospel we read that certain of the disciples went privately to Christ and asked him when the Messianic Kingdom would come, and what would be the signs of its advent. In reply, Christ is reported to have said that, after sundry physical signs and wonders had taken place, the Son of Man would be seen coming in clouds with great power and glory. "And then shall he send forth the angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven. . . . Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass away until all these things be accomplished." Did Christ really believe that in the lifetime of those to whom he was speaking he would come back to earth in great glory and reign over the elect? I am quite certain that he believed



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nothing of the kind. Again and again we see him trying to spiritualize, to dematerialize the current belief in the advent of the Kingdom of God ; trying to take the Kingdom out of time and out of space, to make men realize that it was inward and spiritual, that it was among them and within them. To proclaim, not the advent, but the eternal presence of the inward kingdom was his self-imposed mission. How, then, could he have allowed himself to sink to the level of this materialistic prophecy ? The truth is that the words which are here attributed to Christ might have been uttered by any fervent sharer in the prevailing "Messianic hope." They express a national dream which Christ was so far from countenancing that he strove unceasingly to wean men from it, not indeed by openly disavowing it, but by giving it a new meaning, a new atmosphere, and a new direction. It is worthy of note that this forecast of the Second Advent is not one of the public sayings of Christ. It is the private reply to a private question,—a fact which inclines one to surmise that the writer of the Gospel, determined at all costs to invest the prevailing belief with the high authority of

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Christ, and knowing that there was no evidence of his having openly countenanced it, represented him as having done so in a private interview. But be that as it may. The fact that in this passage Christ is reported to have accepted and ratified a prophetic belief which had long prevailed, which was widely spread and ardently and tenaciously held, but with which he had no sympathy,—to have accepted it and given materialistic expression to it, when it was the very aim of his life to spiritualize it till it should be changed beyond recognition ;—this and the further fact that the passage ends in itself, and is not made subservient to the communication of spiritual truth, makes it impossible for me to regard it as genuine.

The same prophecy is repeated, in almost identical words, in the 24th chapter of St. Matthew, but in the next chapter there is a most important addition to it. When the Son of Man returns to earth he sits in judgment on the throne of glory ; all the nations are gathered before him ; the sheep are separated from the goats ; the righteous, *those who have loved and served their fellow men*, go into eternal life ; the

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wicked, *those who have neither loved nor served their fellow men*, go into eternal punishment. Was this wonderful and beautiful passage really spoken by Christ? It is supposed to be a valuable mine of "theological information;" but "theological information" is the very last thing that a poet-prophet is likely to give us. The description of the Last Judgment occurs in one only of the three Gospels in which the Second Advent prophecy is recorded. This shows that it is not a vital part of that prophecy. How, then, did it get into the First Gospel? That it embodies a real recollection of Christ's teaching cannot be doubted. The splendid glorification of love—the love of man for man—which burns through the clouds of Messianic phantasmagoria, came straight from the soul of Christ. For the rest, all is uncertain. It is conceivable that Christ, weary of being identified by his disciples with the Messiah of their temporal kingdom, and invested by them with the Messianic titles of King and Judge,—it is conceivable that Christ, who said "Judge not that ye be not judged," turned upon his disciples and said to them (or, rather, to himself): "Well, if you will make me judge mankind on

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your imaginary last day, this is how I shall judge them." It is also conceivable that some disciple who had heard Christ identify love with righteousness and life, and the lack of love with wickedness and death, embodied this teaching in the dramatic story of a Final Judgment. Other conjectures might be hazarded, but they would profit us nothing. What is important for us to note is that in this passage the form is nothing, the spirit is everything. Of "theological information," in the theological sense of the phrase, there is not one grain. Not a word in the passage is to be taken literally. The story does not end in itself. On the contrary, it is made wholly subservient to one spiritual purpose—the communication of the divine truth that love is life. This inner truth is hidden from those who insist on deifying its outward form. To lay equal stress on the letter and on the spirit of a prophet's teaching is, in the nature of things, impossible. Blindness to the spirit is the penalty that waits on subservience to the letter. The orthodox theologian seriously believes that on the "last day" Christ will appear in glory and judge mankind, that all men will be either lost or

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saved, that there will be an eternity of bliss for the righteous and an eternity of woe for the wicked. He does not believe what all these details were meant to lead up to and (in a sense) to make manifest; he does not believe—for he has formed an entirely different conception of the conditions of salvation—that the way of salvation is the way of brotherly love.

In conclusion. The story of the Last Judgment is certainly genuine as regards the spirit of its teaching, and may possibly be genuine as regards the letter. If it is genuine in both respects, it is a striking example of a popular belief being transformed, and even transfigured, by being made the vehicle for the communication of a spiritual idea. The fate that it has suffered at the hands of theology is striking and suggestive. There is no passage in the Bible in which love—the love of man for man—is so greatly exalted as in this. There is also no passage in the Bible—so strange is the irony of Fate—which has done so much as this to foster hatred and strife among men and, speaking generally, to make human life dark, desperate, and miserable. One

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shudders to think of the amount of mental torture which men have inflicted upon themselves, of the amount of physical and mental torture which they have inflicted upon their fellow men, owing to their having regarded this prophetic story as a mine of "theological information" instead of as a well-spring of spiritual truth. If we wish to know how the sayings of Christ ought not to be interpreted, we cannot do better than study the attitude of theology towards this particular saying, the "orthodox" interpretation of which has been written on the scroll of history in letters of blood and flame.

Of the many reputed sayings of Christ there is one large class which seems to stand entirely alone, and which, therefore, calls for special consideration,—the sayings that are recorded in the Fourth Gospel. In the first three Gospels the enviroing atmosphere is entirely Jewish. The accepted standard of right and wrong is essentially legal. The hopes and desires and aspirations of those who surrounded Christ, including his own disciples, are essentially Messianic. Dark clouds of legal formalism

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and Messianic materialism obscure the light of Christ's teaching. The clouds are made darker by the light which they veil, but their edges burn with an almost superhuman splendour, and whenever they part, there is an outburst of unclouded sunshine,—the apocalypse of the soul of Christ. In the Fourth Gospel there is overwhelming evidence of a new element in the atmosphere,—that of Greek thought. The distinctively Jewish element has in large measure disappeared, but with it has also disappeared much of what is distinctively Christian. We hear but little of the Pharisees, and still less of those denunciations of Pharisaism which are of the essence of Christ's teaching on its negative side. We hear but little of the Messianic hope, and still less of that proclamation of an inward and spiritual kingdom which is of the essence of Christ's teaching on its positive side. The dark clouds have disappeared, but the sun no longer shines out in occasional bursts of cloudless splendour. For a haze of metaphysical thought now pervades the atmosphere, and obscures, without ever wholly hiding, the spiritual influence of Christ.

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In the three synoptic Gospels the sayings attributed to Christ fall, as we have seen, under three principal heads ;—those which are fundamentally anti-Jewish, and therefore obviously genuine ; those which are fundamentally Jewish, and therefore obviously spurious ; and those which are doubtful, but probably (for the most part) genuine, the notation being Jewish, while the ideas are Christ's own. In the Fourth Gospel we have only one class of sayings,—reminiscences of Christ's teaching, passing through the refracting medium of a mystically metaphysical mind. The writers of the synoptic Gospels were materialists in their religious ideas and general mental outlook : at any rate, they were unable to rise above the semi-materialistic level of the "Messianic hope ;" but they had no definite system of thought into which to fit the sayings of Christ. Hence they either reported him faithfully, naïvely recording sayings which were really subversive of their own dreams and ideals, but the full meaning and ultimate import of which they were too simple to understand ; or, when their memory failed them, they reported him, in perfect good faith, as saying things which he did not believe,



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but which they did. (They held those beliefs so firmly that they could not but assume that they were shared by their Master.) The author of the Fourth Gospel was a thinker, with a quasi-philosophical system of his own,—a spiritual and, in some respects, beautiful system, but far inferior in depth and breadth to the philosophy of Christ. Into that system he tried to fit the teaching of Christ. The result is that, as a revealer of Christ's ideas, he is, I think, far less trustworthy than the authors of the synoptic Gospels. The best biographers are those who have a strain of *naïveté*, bordering on stupidity, in their mental composition. Cleverer men will take care not to let their hero contradict himself; but this merit is more than outweighed by their tendency to obtrude their own theories between the mind of their hero and the minds of their readers,—to obtrude them semi-consciously, and therefore systematically. If the author of the Fourth Gospel never makes Christ say the exact opposite of what he believed, he never, or very seldom, makes him give utterance to the beliefs that really ruled his heart. It may be doubted if any of the sayings which are recorded in

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the Fourth Gospel is entirely genuine. The most Christ-like passage in the Gospel is the apocryphal story of the woman taken in adultery. One can imagine Christ expressing his ideas, to earnest and enthusiastic Jews, in the notation of Judaism. One cannot imagine Christ, whose philosophy was all poetry, expressing his ideas in the notation of a Græco-Judaic metaphysical theory. Also, the Christ of the synoptic Gospels was incapable of the self-glorification in which the author of the Fourth Gospel, with his mind possessed by the theory of the Logos (a kind of metaphysical Messiah), makes his Christ habitually indulge. Even the passages in which love is exalted and inculcated—passages which have done so much to win for this Gospel the esteem and affection of devout minds—do not, as I read them, after steeping my mind in the study of the synoptic Gospels, ring quite true. The disciples are to love one another, not because they are fellow men, children of the All-Father, but because they are disciples of Christ. In the story of the Last Judgment the “saved” are those who have loved and served their fellow-men without having ever known or even heard of Christ. There is no

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passage in the Fourth Gospel that strikes so grand or so deep a note as this.

I have divided the reputed sayings of Christ into four chief classes. There is not a single passage with regard to which I have not asked myself, Were those words really spoken by Christ? There are many passages with regard to which I have asked this question many times, and am still waiting for the answer. But I need not go further into detail. My general attitude towards this fascinating but complicated problem has, I hope, by this time been adequately defined. In the three synoptic Gospels there are many sayings, the genuineness of which may be regarded as beyond dispute. Out of these, as I study them, emerges the figure of Christ,—the figure of one who hated the intolerance, the literalism, and the formalism of the Pharisees, and who was ever striving to spiritualize the semi-materialistic conception of the Kingdom of God, which had expressed itself in the prevailing dream of an approaching Messianic reign;—the figure of one who was the ardent and whole-hearted antagonist of materialism, of dogmatism, and of mechanism, and the ardent

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and whole-hearted champion of spirituality, of freedom, and of life. Whatever in the recorded sayings of Christ seems to blur or distort this figure, I regard with suspicion ; whatever obliterates it, I regard as false.

On the ground which I have cleared by this preliminary attempt to interpret the mind of Christ, I will now try to construct his creed.

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## CHAPTER II—Pharisaism

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**T**HERE are two things about Christ which seem to be quite clear. The first is that he hated Pharisaism. The second is that he believed in the "Kingdom of God."

Let us make the former fact our starting-point. Who were the Pharisees, and why was their teaching and general mental attitude so repugnant to Christ? Let us first rid our minds of the idea that the Pharisees were exceptionally wicked men. The Pharisees were not wicked men. On the contrary, they were excellent men according to their lights; and their lights were those of their age and their nation. The accepted beliefs about God and man; the accepted ideals—national, social, and moral; the accepted principles of action; the accepted standards of right and wrong;—all these they applied with pitiless consistency, with scrupulous exactness, and with fanatical zeal to all the details of human life. In striking at them, Christ struck at the beliefs, principles,

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ideals, and standards of post-exilian Judaism. To expose the shortcomings of the wicked is not the work of a prophet. Had the Pharisees been sinners in the ordinary sense of the word, Christ would have either compassionated or ignored them. It is when goodness—or what passes for such—rests on a hollow foundation, it is when the master-principle of a nation's life has become corrupt, that the time is ripe for a prophet to appear and enter the lists against the "orthodoxy" of his age.

What the Puritans have been to Protestantism, what the Jesuits have been and still are to Romanism, what the Ritualists are to Anglicanism, that the Pharisees were to latter-day Judaism, the Judaism that had prevailed since prophecy died. They were more logical, more consistent, more zealous, more conscientious, more self-sacrificing, more righteous than the rest of the community, more fanatically Jewish than the fanatical Jews by whom they were surrounded. In the words of Professor Emil Schürer, "Pharisaism was the legitimate and classic representative of post-exilian Judaism in general. It did but carry out with relentless energy the consequences of its principle."

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## Pharisaism

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Thus, in striking at Pharisaism, Christ struck at Judaism, at latter-day Judaism in the first instance, but also (as we shall presently see) at Judaism as such.

Now, the essence of Judaism was devotion to a divinely given law. For many centuries the tendency, inevitable in all such cases, to deify the letter of the Law and ignore its spirit, was held in check by the spiritual vitality of the nation, manifesting itself, as spiritual vitality always does, in poetry,—the poetry of psalmist and prophet. After the Exile, when, with the gradual decadence of the nation, the insight of the prophet grew dim, and the fire of poetic inspiration burned low, the letter of the Law established itself at the expense of the spirit, and the legal conception of life achieved a final and lasting triumph.

Let us ask ourselves what this meant and what it involved. The idea on which the legalism of the Jews was grounded was that God had entered into a covenant with His chosen people Israel ; that He had delivered to His people a law or system of rules for the regulation of their lives ; that obedience to this law would be rewarded, and disobedience to it

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punished, both in this life and (according to the belief of post-exilian Judaism) in the life to come ; that national obedience or disobedience would be requited by national weal or woe, and that in like manner the individual would be rewarded for his good deeds and punished for his transgressions, the reward or the punishment (whether national or individual) being in every case exactly proportioned to the merits or demerits of those whose deeds had been weighed in the balance of God's justice. The letter of the Law was regarded as divine. Every detail in it, every regulation, however seemingly trivial, had come from God ; and obedience was therefore as obligatory in the case of the most minute and vexatious of civil or ceremonial enactments as in the case of the weightiest matter of the Law. But though the letter of the Law had been given to Israel by God, and might therefore be regarded as complete in itself, to the multiplication of its rules there was, in the nature of things, no end ; for as cases were continually occurring which the letter of the Law had not provided for, it became necessary for fresh rules, each of these being an application or extension of some



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existing rule, to be continually formulated ; and that this work might be the more effectually accomplished, it became necessary for certain persons to devote themselves to the systematic study of the Law, with a view to qualifying themselves to deal with doubtful cases. These Scribes, as they were called, were not merely diligent students of the Law, but critical observers of the lives of their fellow-men. Every action that was not obviously correct had to be weighed in the scales of their legal knowledge, so that wrong-doing might, if necessary, be reproved, and that rules might be framed for the treatment of similar or analogous cases in the future. Thus obedience to the letter of a formulated law became the whole duty of man ; and as the Law became more and more complicated, and descended deeper and deeper into the details of human life, the burden laid upon the individual became ever more oppressive, and the despotism under which he lived more rigid and more exacting. Nor was it only constraint from within—the pressure of the Law on his stupefied and enfeebled conscience—from which he suffered. His whole life (for he had been taught to

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identify life with outward action) was lived under *surveillance*. The eyes of the legal expert were upon him, and everything that he did was liable to be criticized by men who estimated the worth of actions, not by reference to the motives that were behind them or to the consequences that they might be expected to produce, but solely by reference to their conformity to the letter of the Law.

What fruits was such a conception of life likely to bear? Let us look at the life of the individual from three points of view,—from the point of view of his relation to God, of his own character, and of his relation to his fellow-men. These three points of view—the religious, the moral, and the social—have much, perhaps everything, in common, and my only object in keeping them distinct is to introduce some element of order into my own thoughts.

The idea of a covenant between God and Man, when kept (as poetry keeps it) in the region of natural law, is sternly grand and fundamentally true; but when the vitalizing influence of poetry ceases to be felt, and the

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letter of the Law which God is supposed to have given to Man comes to be regarded as divine, the idea degenerates into the most soulless of all conceptions, that of a commercial bargain, drawn up with legal accuracy and acuteness, and formally binding on both parties to the transaction. It was thus that Israel, in his post-exilian days, had learned to conceive of God. For as a man conceives of life and duty, so will he conceive of God; and as he conceives of God, so will he conceive of life and duty. The two conceptions act and react on one another unceasingly, each modifying the other and both converging on a common goal. That complete externalization of religion and morality which was characteristic of latter-day Judaism had its parallel, in Jewish thought, in a complete externalization and quasi-materialization of God. God had always been regarded by Israel as an omnipotent potentate, whose existence, apart from and above His subject-people, was as certain and as actual (one might almost say) as that of an Eastern monarch, and whose chief function was to dispense *from without* semi-material rewards and penalties to those who kept or broke His Law. But the germs

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of degeneration which lurked in this conception developed in post-exilian days with terrible rapidity. From Prophecy to Scribism the descent is abrupt and unfathomable. The Scribe, like the Prophet, undertook to interpret the will of God to his fellow men. And what was the vision of God that inspired him? The vision of a man like himself; the vision of a hair-splitting sophist; of a quibbling lawyer; of one who could insist on the literal fulfilment of the most vexatious of his legal enactments, and yet wink at evasion of the spirit of his law; of one who held men guilty if they kept their food warm for the Sabbath in manure or sand, but guiltless if they kept it warm in feathers or tow; of one who was content that men should pay tithes of mint and cumin and anise, and omit the weightier offerings of mercy, justice, and truth.

As is the God whom one worships, so is the ideal which one pursues. The complete de-spiritualization of God, which accompanied the triumph of legalism, was itself accompanied by the complete de-spiritualization of man's ideal. But an ideal which has been de-spiritualized has ceased to exist. The conception of God as

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the far-off goal of spiritual perfection, the consequent desire to "grow in grace," the vision of heavenly beauty, the aspiration which never counts itself to have apprehended,—these had no meaning and no existence for him who lived under the Law. So complete was the loss of the ideal that a finite conception of righteousness was deliberately adopted. If a man could so order his life as to steer clear of doubtful cases and obey all the rules of the Law, perfect righteousness would be attained, and the full and final reward of righteousness would be earned. It is true that, with the inevitable development of casuistical science, fresh rules were for ever being added to the Law, and that to this process of fissiparation there could be no assignable limits. But in spite of this the legal conception of righteousness remained essentially finite. The task which casuistry was compelled to set itself proved to be infinite; but its infinitude was, in the first place, an unforeseen and unwelcome addition to the presumably finite burden of legal obligation, and, in the second place, it was the infinitude of a *descending* "series," an infinitude within finite limits,—not a spiritual ascent towards an ideal

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type, but a quasi-mathematical descent into the sordid, the trivial, and the infinitesimal.

Such a misconception of the ideal and the divine is bound to act disastrously on the character of those who entertain it. The loss of the ideal in the region of desire must needs have its counterpart in the region of conduct in the loss of the inward standard. In the eyes of those who see things as they are, actions are right or wrong according as the inner source from which they spring is pure or polluted; according as they react for good or evil on the character of the doer; and according as their consequences are beneficial or the reverse, on the whole and in the long run, not merely to those who are directly and obviously affected by them, but to humanity at large. This triune standard was wholly ignored by legalism. For those who lived under the Law, actions were good or bad according as they complied or failed to comply with the letter of the Law's enactments. No other standard was recognized; no other consideration carried weight. "Is it so commanded?" was the only question that had to be asked. And with the loss of the inward

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standard came, as might have been expected, the loss of the sense of moral proportion. Whether the commandment that was kept or broken was weighty or trivial, moral (in the true sense of the word) or merely ceremonial, spiritual or material, of infinite or of infinitesimal importance, mattered nothing. Obedience to the Law was always righteous and worthy of reward. Disobedience was always sinful and worthy of punishment. In the sphere of human action (which, for legalism, was co-terminous with the sphere of human life) two colours, and two only, were visible,—black and white. All intermediate shades were ignored. A kind of spiritual colour-blindness had taken possession of men's minds; and, as a consequence of this, a deadly dualism,—fatal alike to the infinity and to the continuity of Nature—dominated their thought.

The results of this systematic externalization of the inner life of man were disastrous and far-reaching. Three vital attributes of the human spirit withered and well-nigh perished in the atmosphere of the Law,—Freedom, Conscience, and Imagination. That legalism is the negation of *freedom* is self-evident. A wide and

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ever-widening range of movement is imperatively demanded by freedom. Systematic restriction of choice is as antithetical to her being as death is to life. Now the triumph of legalism was signaled by the restriction of human freedom to a single narrow channel of choice. Freedom to choose between obedience and disobedience to the Law was admitted and even insisted upon. For the rest, man was regarded as an automaton, as something even lower and more soulless than a slave. Freedom to map out one's life, to pursue an ideal, to look before and after, to discern good from evil, to distinguish between law and law, to weigh conflicting motives, to forecast the consequences of action—freedom to desire, to judge, to plan—had entirely ceased to be. Everything was settled for the votary of the Law down to the minutest detail of his outward life. In Schürer's words, "Nothing was left to free personality, everything was placed under the bondage of the letter. At every step, at the work of his calling, at prayer, at meals, at home and abroad, from early morning till late in the evening, from youth to old age, the dead, the deadening formula awaited him." To destroy



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freedom is to cut off the supply of life at its fountain-head. For freedom is no mere negation. To confuse it, as is so often done, with the absence of constraint, is to admit by implication the validity of the legal conception of life and duty. The life of man is never exempt from the pressure of Nature's forces. If systematic pressure is withdrawn from it, random pressure must needs take its place. The soul is free, not when it is at the mercy of every random impulse, but when it is acted upon by congenial forces, when it is exposed to spiritual pressure, to constraint from within itself. In other words, it is free when it is self-constrained, when the true self, the divine element in man, is making its influence felt. The difference between freedom and bondage is the difference between compulsion from within and compulsion from without. The weakness that places the soul at the mercy of every random impulse is very near of kin to the weakness that places it at the mercy of mechanical restrictions, of the letter of a lifeless law. When freedom is reduced to a minimum—whether by rampant licence or by rampant legalism matters little—the growth of the soul

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is arrested, and the process of degeneration has begun.

From freedom to *conscience* there is but a single step. Indeed, conscience is but another aspect of freedom,—freedom to know as distinguished from freedom to do. The saying, so characteristic of the Old Testament, that “it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps,” is profoundly true, but only in the sense that impulse and guidance must come to a man from a deeper source than his ordinary self. Legalism appealed for sanction to this and to similar sayings; but in the act of interpreting them it undermined their authority by emptying them of their poetry and their inner meaning. For legalism, wherever or whenever it may have prevailed, has ever based itself on the assumption that man is spiritually blind; and having started with this assumption, it has ever striven to justify it, by making it impossible for its votary to use his “inward eye,” and by thus atrophying, and at last destroying, his inward sight. That man is radically and inherently incapable of distinguishing right from wrong, that his path must be pointed out to him at every turn, or rather, that his hand must

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be held at every step, is the one overmastering conviction which gave purpose and impetus to the zeal of the Pharisee and the industry of the Scribe. In practice, as we have just seen, legalism has always deprived men of freedom, but in theory it has never done so. On the contrary, it has impressed upon him that, within the narrow and ever-narrowing limits which it has prescribed for him, his will is free and his power of choice unimpaired. But deliberately and with clear consciousness it has insisted that he is blind.

With the decay of conscience, with the loss of the moral intuition, conscientiousness degenerated, as might have been expected, into a moral disease, into a hair-splitting, sophistical, self-torturing, casuistry; which, far from concerning itself with the larger issues of life, descended deeper and ever deeper into the ever-narrowing vortex of the infinitesimal. And even this perverted form of conscientiousness was not to be indulged in by the ordinary man. "Life was indeed" (to quote Schürer's words) "a continual torment to the earnest man, who felt at every moment that he was in danger of transgressing the Law; and when so much depended

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on the external form, he was often left in uncertainty whether he had really fulfilled its requirements." But though he was free to torture himself with doubts and perplexities, he was not free to solve the problems that perplexed him. This, like everything else, had to be done for him. If the letter, the formula, failed to give him the guidance that he needed, he must appeal to those who were learned in the Law. The blindness of the natural, the un-instructed man, was the first and last dogma of the psychology of legalism.

When conscience is at work, "the vision and the faculty divine" is exercising itself in the sphere of human conduct. When *imagination* is at work, the same faculty is exercising itself in a wider and more impersonal sphere. In each case vision generates desire; but whereas in the lesser sphere the object of desire—ideal good—is, *ex hypothesi*, to be won, or at any rate pursued, through the medium of moral action, and is, in that sense and to that extent, within the reach of every man, in the larger sphere the media through which the ideal is to be pursued are those of poetry and art, media in which only exceptionally gifted natures are able to

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live and work. Hence it is that conscience is an impulse—an impulse to action to which few men are wholly insensible—as well as a guiding light ; whereas in the play of imagination (in the wider sense of the word), though desire in some form or other is always present, and though in some cases the pressure which it exerts is irresistible, for most men its motive force is weakened by the very rarity of the air that has to be breathed and the very boundlessness of the sphere that has to be explored. But this does not alter the fact that the sphere of imagination includes the sphere of conscience, and that imagination enters largely into the composition of conscience—nay, that it is the very fire of which conscience is the guiding light.

I need not take pains to prove that the atmosphere of the Law was necessarily fatal to imagination. The wings of the soul are given to it by imagination ; and as the Law restricted at every turn the free movement of the human spirit, as it would not allow it to take a single step without guidance, it followed *à fortiori* that it would never suffer it to soar. The loftiest problems that imagination aspires to handle are

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those that relate to the nature and will of God. To assume, with legalism, that the will of God, which must needs be the outcome and expression of His nature, has been communicated to man, and is so fully and accurately known by him that he has been able to set it forth as a formulated code of law, is to debar imagination from undertaking that last and highest enterprise, the attractive force of which is the secret of its restless activity and the ultimate source of all its lesser energies. "Philosophy begins"—eternally begins—"in wonder." So does poetry. So does art. So does science. To quench with cold jets of legal "doctrine" the flame that wonder has kindled is to arrest the outgrowth of man's higher life. For the various energies of imagination are so vitally interconnected that it is impossible for one of them to be weakened without the rest being in some measure impaired. And when the one that is weakened happens to be the highest of all, the injury that is done to the rest makes itself felt on every plane of man's being. I have said that the sphere of imagination includes the sphere of moral action. As insight into the heart of things is of the essence of imagination, and as sympathy is at

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once the source and the product of insight, it stands to reason that imagination is as much at home in the field of moral action as in that of artistic emotion or speculative thought. It is indeed scarcely an exaggeration to say that it is the largest and loftiest of all moral faculties, and that the lack of it, involving as it does the lack of human sympathy and the unrestricted outgrowth of an all-absorbing egotism, is the gravest of all moral defects.

When freedom, conscience, and imagination—each a vital aspect of man's inner life—are dying of starvation, the soul is being brought within measurable distance of death. This is what happened under the Law. The effort to grow was abandoned, and a systematic attempt to be "saved" by automatic action took its place. But in the spiritual world, as in every other sphere of Nature's energy, the one master-law holds good,—wherever there is life there is growth, and the entire cessation of growth is the first symptom of incipient decay. Disguise it from ourselves as we may, the fact remains that the first and last duty of man is to "grow in grace," to expand and develop his soul. It was, as we shall presently see, spiritual

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indolence, reluctance to undertake the serious and onerous work of growing, reluctance to use and cultivate the divine gifts of will-power, of moral intuition, and of imagination, that generated legalism ; and legalism ministered to the weakness to which it owed its being, by doing its best to make spiritual growth impossible. The real importance of moral action lies in its reaction on the character of the doer, conduct being the medium in which, for ordinary men, the process of growth has to be carried on, and virtue tending to expand and elevate the soul as surely as vice tends to contract and degrade it. Looked at from this point of view, the Law, though non-moral (for the most part) in its details, is seen to be profoundly immoral in its general scope and tendency. We are rewarded for being good and doing good by becoming better. This conception of duty and the reward of duty was wholly lost sight of by legalism. Righteousness, in the legal sense of the word, consisted in the performance of actions which were, with few exceptions, out of relation to the character of the agent ; and the reward of righteousness was supposed to come from without, not from within. In teaching men to



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regard non-moral trifles as sacred duties, the due discharge of which would enable them to have tangible rewards weighed out to them by God ; in telling men that this mechanical work and this quasi-material recompense were the main, if not the sole, concerns of life,—legalism led them into the broad and easy road—broad and easy, however tiresome and vexatious it may have been, as compared with the steep and narrow path of spiritual effort—into the well-trodden road of lifeless routine, a road which ends at last in spiritual death. The incessant repetition of meaningless acts for no other reason than that they have been “commanded” by one who can and will reward obedience, is worse than a narcotic to the soul ; it inoculates it at last with the deadliest of all maladies, with a kind of spiritual “sleeping-sickness,” from which, if it be not arrested in its earlier stages, there is no awaking.

We can reach the same conclusion by a slightly different line of thought. The loss of the ideal, which we have seen to be characteristic of life under the Law, is equivalent to the abandonment of the effort to grow. For wherever there is growth there is movement towards an ideal

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type, the perfect form of the thing that grows. This ideal type is *in* the thing that grows, in all the stages of its development from germination to maturity ; and the pursuit of it is therefore an essentially inward movement, a struggle to go deeper and deeper into one's own true nature, to get nearer and nearer to one's own true self. This effort of the ideal to realize itself in the inner life of man generates freedom when the influence of the ideal manifests itself as *force*, conscience when it manifests itself as *light*, imagination when it manifests itself as *fire*; and these three—fire, light, and force—are not three but one. It follows that the loss of the ideal means the loss of freedom, of conscience, and of imagination ; means the cessation of the effort to grow in grace ; means, in the last resort, the death of the soul.

The final result of the loss of the ideal, and the final proof of the morbid degeneration of the soul, is the outgrowth of spiritual pride. The man who pursues an ideal has nothing to be proud of except that his goal is unattainable ; and this knowledge humiliates him in the very act of exalting him. Such a man is proud, not of what he is, but of what he is not ; not of what

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he has done, but of what he can never hope to do. The legalist, on the contrary, regarded each act of obedience as a good thing, as something achieved, something to be proud of, something that entitled him to a reward. That he could feel pride in his achievements shows how low his standard had fallen, how finite his ideal had become. In the eyes of the idealist achievement is only redeemed from total failure by being allowed to rank as partial failure, by being regarded as the vantage ground for a fresh upward movement. In the eyes of the legalist each achievement was a thing complete in itself, a thing which could never be improved upon. In other words (though, of course, he did not realize this), it was something "finished and finite," a seed that would never germinate, a bud that would never blow. To say of the Law that it generated spiritual pride is to bring against it the gravest and most comprehensive of all charges. The pride of the Pharisee who recounted his good deeds in the Temple, and thanked God that he was not like the Publican, measured the depth of his spiritual degradation.

Whatever unfits a man for doing his duty

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to God and to himself, unfits him in an equal degree for doing his duty to his fellow men. Of all ethical codes the Law, as interpreted by the Scribes and practised by the Pharisees, was the most entirely non-human. The duties that it prescribed were for the most part purely ceremonial. By the side of these it placed a certain number of moral duties ; but its own fundamental assumption forbade it to exalt the latter above the former. For as the letter of the Law was regarded as divine, it followed that every enactment, however weighty or however trivial it might seem to be, had behind it the sanction and authority of the God of Israel, and that therefore all enactments were equally binding on the devout Jew. In Schürer's words, "Merely conventional demeanour in outward matters and ceremonies was of the same value as the fulfilment of the highest religious and moral duties." Now, it is a comparatively easy matter to discharge ceremonial obligations, to perform the ablutions which the Law requires, to eat the food which the Law prescribes, to give tithe of mint and cumin and anise, and the rest ; whereas it is a very difficult matter to control one's appetite and one's temper, and to be just,

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merciful, and unselfish in one's dealings with others. It is true that, owing to the intricacy and ambiguity of the Law, the path of him who tried to obey all its ceremonial ordinances was beset with difficulty; but the difficulty was immeasurably lighter, and belonged to an immeasurably lower level of life than that which beset the path of him who tried to do his duty to his fellow men. And so, under the stress and pressure of one of Nature's inexorable laws, the baser coinage began to drive the sterling gold out of circulation; the non-moral duties began to establish themselves at the expense of the moral; ceremonial punctilio at the expense of mercy, justice, and truth.

It was indeed but natural that the strict legalist should begin to think lightly of his duty to his neighbour. In dealings between man and man the motives and the consequences of action are matters of supreme importance: but legalism knows of only two motives to action, the hope of outward reward and the fear of outward punishment; and it knows of only two classes of consequences, the rewards that are prepared for the righteous (in the strictly legal sense of the word) and the punishments

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that wait on sin. Hence it was that what I may call a non-moral way of looking at moral duties began to prevail. The legalist who honoured his father and his mother, or who abstained from murdering his neighbour, did so not because his better nature prompted him to do so, but because it was so commanded; while the legalist who stole from his neighbour, or who committed adultery with his neighbour's wife, thought little of the injury that he had done to his fellow man, but much of the penalty that he had earned by breaking the Law. The result of this was that morality, in the human and social sense of the word, withered under the blighting influence of the Law, lost its distinctive character, lost the very property which constitutes its essence and its life. And when, thus slighted and weakened, it was assailed by the strong natural forces—by the lusts and passions—which are ever warring against it, it found but little support in that natural goodness of heart which is, after all, the most powerful of all incentives to moral action. We have seen that insight and imagination were starved and stunted in the atmosphere of the Law. It was inevitable that sympathy—the

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third person of this inward and spiritual trinity—should share their fate. And as sympathy dwindled, the one unflinching source of natural goodness began to dry up. Nor did morality, in its hour of need, find support in the hopes and fears that deterred men from breaking the ceremonial enactments of the Law. On the contrary, it found that these hopes and fears were the very instruments of its overthrow. For the legalist, prompted by his baser impulses to break this or that moral commandment, and anxious to avoid the penal consequences of his sin, found means to prove that it was no sin, found means, while violating the spirit of the commandment, to satisfy the letter. As Schürer has truly said, “When once the question was started, ‘What have I to do to fulfil the Law?’ the temptation was obvious, that composition with the letter would be chiefly aimed at, at the cost of the real demands of morality, nay, of the proper intention of the Law itself.” So long as the casuist confined himself to the ceremonial side of the Law, the chief result of his labour was to make ceremonialism more and more ridiculous. But there were graver problems which casuistry was all too ready to handle.

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The commandments which the "natural man" found most inconvenient were those which directed him to control his lusts and passions in the interests of his fellow men. As these commandments were for the most part purely negative, and, owing to their covering a wide field of action, were of necessity vaguely worded, they were more easily evaded than the preciser and less important formulæ of the Law. In morality the spirit of the commandment is everything, and therefore the opportunities for sacrificing the spirit to the letter, the opportunities for casuistical evasion are innumerable. In all ages the casuist's client has been one who hesitates between two courses of action, of which one is manifestly right, while the other, which is more agreeable to him, seems at first sight to be wrong, though it may possibly prove to be lawful. Such a man can have but one motive in consulting a Doctor or a Priest. If his sole concern were for righteousness, he would, without hesitation, do what is manifestly right. As he finds it necessary to seek advice, we must conclude that he desires legal sanction for the less righteous but more attractive course of action. In the



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very act of submitting his case to an expert he has intimated pretty plainly how he wishes it to be dealt with. His adviser has to ask himself which solution of the moral problem is the more likely to make his client return to him for guidance. To this question there can be but one answer. He must allow his client to do what his unsophisticated moral sense had made him shrink from doing. But he must throw over his conduct the veil of legality. He must affiliate the immoral action to the moral law. And, strange as it may seem, it will be possible for him to do this without offering deliberate violence to his own conscience. For the interpreter of a law which has been supernaturally delivered is as careless of consequences, whether outward or inward,<sup>1</sup> as of motives, his sole concern being to see that the action which he is called upon to criticize squares with the formal requirements of his tabulated code. That compliance with the letter of the Law is the sole criterion of moral worth may well become the

<sup>1</sup> By the outward consequences of an action, I mean its effect upon the happiness of one's neighbours. By the inward consequences, I mean its reaction upon the character of the doer.

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settled conviction of those who are accustomed to look at life from the legal point of view. The casuist who has fortified himself in this conclusion will be able and willing to give to any problem that may be submitted to him the solution that is desired by his client. In other words, he will have mastered the science of excuses and evasions and become a professional pander to vice. Of the ravages which casuistry had wrought in the field of moral action, when Christ came into collision with the Law, I need not speak at length. The words of fierce indignation in which Christ denounced the Doctors of his day for tampering with the sanctity of the oath, of the marriage tie, and of filial duty, are still ringing in our ears.

The very idea in which legalism was rooted—the idea of a special revelation of God's will—is anti-human in its tendency. The covenant between God and His chosen people was made for *their* benefit only. All who were outside the pale of Judaism were beyond the reach of God's grace and favour. The heathen, the "nations," neither knew God nor were known of Him. In a society which was dominated by

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such an assumption, the most profoundly moral of all sentiments—the love of man as man—could not flourish, could not even exist. A spirit of exclusiveness (akin to that of the rigid Catholic in his dealings with the non-Catholic world), an intolerant contempt of those who did not know the God of Israel, became a prominent characteristic of every zealous Jew. This feeling was the counterpart of that sentiment of spiritual pride of which I have already spoken, and which, when fully developed, marks the lowest depth of spiritual degradation. As spiritual pride is the very negation of spiritual aspiration, and therefore of spiritual life, so is separatism the very negation of brotherly love, and therefore of all that is human and social in morality.

If the attitude of the Jew towards the Gentile was one of spiritual aloofness, of shrinking from contact with an unclean thing, his attitude towards his brother Jew was one of inquisitorial interference with his daily life. Whichever of his many duties to his neighbour he might shirk or minimize, there was one which he neither shirked nor minimized,—that of supervising his neighbour's conduct. When the

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moral standard is inward and spiritual, criticism of one's neighbour's conduct becomes both impertinent and impossible ; for as neither the inward motives to nor the inward consequences of an action can be known to any one but the actor, and as it is on these that the moral worth of the action is felt to depend, the futility of sitting in judgment on one's neighbour becomes apparent, and the critic finds it easier and more profitable to sit in judgment on himself. But when the standard is outward and mechanical, as it was under the Law, criticism of the doings of others becomes an easy task (for the measure of moral worth is ready to every man's hand), and it may even come to be regarded as a solemn duty. That it was so regarded by the stricter Jews in the time of Christ is abundantly clear. There was nothing in the bearing of the Pharisees that incensed Christ so strongly as their intolerant dogmatism, their censorious attitude towards their fellow men. And it was because they were dogmatic and censorious on principle and not of *malice prepense*—it was because in this as in other matters they were not unconscientious but ultra-conscientious—that Christ launched against them the arrows of his

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wrathful scorn. Christ's lifelong struggle with the Pharisees was a battle against principles, not against men. It was the system, the scheme of life, that had become corrupt. According to the current belief, the disobedient drew down penalties on the nation as well as on themselves, while the righteous earned rewards for the nation as well as for themselves; and, that being so, it is not to be wondered at that the Jews, whose patriotism was as intense as it was narrow and exclusive, watched one another's doings with a vigilantly critical eye, and that, speaking generally, their censoriousness was proportioned to their conscientiousness and their zeal for the Law. The merciless criticism to which the legalist subjected his neighbours and was subjected himself, was in fact the last, and in some respects the worst, of the fruits of the Law. Externalization of all that is inward and spiritual is of the very essence of legalism; and when, as in the days of Christ, the life of moral action was lived, in its entirety, in the fierce light of a perverted public opinion, when responsibility to opinion had taken the place of responsibility to conscience, when the inquisitorial despotism of opinion had extinguished

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the last spark of personal freedom, the externalizing process had evidently reached its final term, and the triumph of machinery over life was complete. Under such conditions the foundations of morality were necessarily undermined by the very efforts that were made to support them ; for while vice, rendered subtle and insidious by casuistry, found immunity from criticism behind the mask of hypocrisy, virtue itself became the foster-mother of the deadliest of all moral evils,—uncharitableness and spiritual pride.

In painting this dark picture of life under the Law, I have been thinking less of legalism in general than of that special development of it which was called Pharisaism. For the Pharisees did in practice what I have tried to do in theory : they followed the principles of legalism into all their logical consequences. Pharisaism was, in fact, the inner citadel of Judaism, *separated* indeed, as the name suggests, from normal Judaism, but separated from it from within, not from without. As the Jews separated themselves from the Gentiles who had not the Law, so the Pharisees separated themselves from the Jews

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who had the Law, but did not scrupulously obey it. Inheritors of a false conception of life and duty—that of salvation by obedience—they devoted themselves to its service with a loyalty and an ardour which were worthy of a better cause. Fearlessly, pitilessly, consistently, they applied the dominant ideas of legalism to all the details of man's daily life. Firmly believing that they were doing God's will and keeping His commandments, they waged a truceless war against freedom, against conscience, against imagination, against all the higher attributes of man's nature, against the very life of the soul. In their zeal for God they degraded Him to the level of a task-master and a bargainer. In their zeal for religion they degraded it to the level of commercial obligation. In their zeal for righteousness they degraded it to the level of a barren ceremonialism. In their zeal for the Law they degraded it to the level of a network of vexatious and meaningless rules. Duty to God, duty to self, duty to one's fellow men,—all these they subordinated to and at last absorbed into the most demoralizing of all duties—duty to the letter of the Law. The result of this was that their very

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conscientiousness taught them the art of evasion, and the very rigour of their virtue made them pander to vice. Finally, and above all, the more they "grew in grace," the more anti-human they were doomed to become. Proud, self-righteous, exclusive, intolerant, despotic, inquisitorial, censorious, uncharitable, they violated in their every deed and word and thought, they violated deliberately and with the best of intentions, the law in which all laws are summed up and held in solution, the law of brotherly love.

Such was Pharisaism, the most strenuous and sustained effort that the human spirit has ever made to win salvation by mechanical obedience; in other words, to fetter its own freedom, to arrest its own growth, to stifle its own life. The triumph of routine over spiritual freedom has often been witnessed, and has generally been due to a nation or a Church forgetting its ideals and sinking into a state of mental lassitude and moral torpor. But what is most characteristic of Pharisaism is that in it the loss of an ideal—the loss, one might almost say, of all spiritual ideals—was accepted as a new ideal, and pursued with untiring industry and fanatical zeal. The desire to be "saved"



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by machinery has its ultimate source in spiritual indolence ; but it sometimes happens that spiritual indolence on one plane of life generates intense spiritual (or quasi-spiritual) activity on a lower plane ; and this is what happened in the case of Pharisaism.

The danger from which Christ delivered the Western World was imminent and great. Long before Judaism had been transfigured (in some measure) by the charm of his personality, the stern monotheism of the Jews, and their strong, though perverted, sense of moral obligation had fascinated a world in which the ideals of polytheism had exhausted their influence and had begun to generate (as so often happens in such cases) widespread moral corruption. One trembles to think what might have happened if Christ had not appeared on the scene. Even as it was, Pharisaism won a partial triumph. For it may perhaps be said that in Christianity, as it was accepted by the world, the ideas of Pharisaism entered into combination with the influence (unhappily divorced from the philosophy) of Christ. Had that influence not been there to serve as a secret antidote to the poison of Pharisaism, had Christ not been there to

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inoculate Pharisaism with the germs of his own ideas, and so prepare the way for its ultimate destruction, Jerusalem would have given to the West, not Christianity in any sense of the word, but the Gospel of spiritual death.

Let us now study the genesis of Pharisaism, that, in following it up to its fountain-head, we may at the same time trace Christ's hostility to it back to the fundamental ideas that ruled his soul.

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## CHAPTER III—God the Lawgiver

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**B**EHIND the Law stands the Lawgiver. If the Law was, as Israel believed, literally divine, it must have been given to him by God Himself. In other words, God must have held direct intercourse with Israel, talked to him, revealed Himself to him. That all this had happened Israel was firmly convinced, and the contagion of his conviction is still a living force.

There is a "child within us" which, in the extremity of its weakness and self-distrust, is ever ready to cry out, "Tell me what to believe, and I will believe it. Tell me what to do, and I will do it." The weakness of this child was and still is the strength of Judaism. The settled air of assurance that pervades the Old Testament, the calm, matter-of-fact way in which its writers tell us that God said this thing and did that, has impressed the average man—the man who cannot or will not outgrow the "child within him"—with the belief that

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there was one people at least who really did know about God, and that in the Sacred Writings of that people is enshrined the knowledge which all men are in search of. To know about God, to know about His ways and works, clearly, precisely, prosaically, as one knows about the visible things that lie around one, is the end and aim of the average man's spiritual desire;<sup>1</sup> and it is because Israel, whose own heart was wholly possessed by that desire, has ministered to it as no other people has ever done, that the average man in all ages and in all parts of the Western World has accepted him as an authoritative teacher and an entirely trustworthy guide.

But is it possible for man to know about God; and, if so, under what conditions, and in what sense of the word *knowledge*? This question is, for obvious reasons, unanswerable; but when once it has been asked, it becomes incumbent upon us to attempt to answer it. It was scientific knowledge, certain and accurate knowledge *about* God, which Israel professed to deliver to mankind, and which Christendom

<sup>1</sup> So far as his spiritual desire is consciously realized. The real desire of his heart lies deeper and goes deeper than this.

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believes itself to have received at his hands. There is one field, and one only, in which the phenomenon of scientific knowledge can at present be studied with profit,—the physical plane of existence, the world which is revealed to us by our bodily senses. Now we know the physical plane of existence because we belong to it; because we are in it and on it; because our bodies are part of it; because we discern its phenomena by means of appropriate senses; because we knew it instinctively, subconsciously, and practically long before we acquired that systematized, theoretical knowledge of it which goes by the name of science. And we know *about* the physical plane of existence because, even while we are in it and on it, we are able, in virtue of some higher principle which lifts us above it, to stand apart from it, to look at it calmly, clearly, and dispassionately, and to become disinterested students of its facts and laws. It does not follow that all men are equally well acquainted with the world in which they live. In this, as in other matters, specialization of functions is an ever-growing necessity. The scientific knowledge of the average man has but an embryonic existence as compared

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with that of the trained physicist. Yet there is nothing that the latter knows which might not conceivably be communicated to the former ; for the difference between their respective reasoning faculties is a difference of degree, not of kind, and the bodily senses of the average man are as fully developed as those of the physicist, and are in all probability quite as healthy and trustworthy. In other words, the average man, though not in possession of much scientific knowledge of physical phenomena, is in a position to receive and assimilate it.

Is he in a position to receive and assimilate scientific knowledge of God ? Scientific knowledge of what is, *ex hypothesi*, supreme and ultimate is, in the nature of things, unattainable by any type of mind. For "*vere scire est per causas scire.*" We know what is palpable through the medium of what is impalpable, what is isolated and on the surface through the medium of what is wide and deep ; we know the effect through the cause, the phenomenon through the law, the lesser through the larger truth. But when we get to what is supreme and ultimate, we have obviously come to the end of our quest of cause and law. So one

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feels constrained to reason ; but let us for the moment assume that this dream of knowing about God is not to be dismissed on *à priori* grounds as wholly vain and illusory. In that case, arguing from what seems to be our only available analogy, we must surely say that if man is to know about God, he must be in living contact with what I may call the divine plane of existence, he must have matured the senses that enable him to discern its realities, and he must have long possessed an intuitive and subconscious knowledge of God analogous to that which on the physical plane prepared the way for the outgrowth of physical science. Also, if the analogy of physical science is to be further followed, while he is on the divine plane of existence he must be able in some sort to lift himself above it, and to study its phenomena with a clear, unclouded vision, with a calm, dispassionate mind, and with a disinterested desire for abstract truth. Let us waive the latter condition, the fulfilment of which is obviously impossible, and let us ask ourselves what is involved in the former. We mean by God, if we mean anything, that last term in life's ascending series which at once sums up and

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transcends all other terms ; we mean the ideal of the soul's loftiest aspiration ; we mean, to use simpler language, whatever is highest and best. It follows that, if man is to know about God, he must be living, he must long have been living, to his own highest and best self ; he must have gone far in the direction of his inward ideal ; he must have far outgrown the average level of human life. In other words, he must have done the very thing which the average man is most reluctant to do, the very thing which he expects theology to relieve him from the hateful necessity of doing,—he must have made abundant spiritual growth.

This, then, is the average man's dilemma. He desires to know about God, but his chief reason for desiring this is that it will render it unnecessary for him, as he fondly imagines, to make that inward and spiritual effort which (as it happens) alone can qualify him to assimilate the knowledge of God. The desire to know about God is so fundamentally fallacious that, even if it could, by some inconceivable miracle, be gratified, the food of revealed truth would turn at last into a deadly poison, owing to the inability of the soul that asked for it to transmute



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it into the substance of its own being and the fuel of its own life. For, however pure and spiritual might be the creed which was delivered to the average man, from whatever height of poetry or prophecy it might have come down to him, he would be sure, sooner or later, to degrade it to the level of the "child within him," the level of his own unexpanded and undeveloped soul. Nay, if God Himself spoke or tried to speak to one who was not ready to anticipate and interpret His message by a life of Godward effort, the message would of necessity remain unspoken; for in the atmosphere of commonplace thought and feeling even the largest and loftiest words become unfit, as unfit as are the symbols of mathematics, for the transmission of divine truth.

When we say that the desire to know about God is of all desires the most fallacious and futile, we imply that the religion and philosophy of Israel were tainted at their very fountain-head. For it was the struggle of this desire to fulfil itself that controlled the destiny of Israel, that gave him (through the medium of the Law) his individuality as a nation and his extraordinary tenacity of national life, and that

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made him, for good or for evil, the power that he has long been and still is in the world of religious life and thought.

Let us trace, from its inception in this desire, the development of his creed and his scheme of life. To know about God, as one knows about a stone or a plant, was the master desire of his heart. If we are to know about a thing, it is essential that we should be able to separate it from ourselves. It follows that Israel debarred himself at the outset from seeking for God in his own soul. This, as it happens, is precisely what he intended to do ; for the presence of God in the heart must needs be a source of spiritual enlightenment, and it was to Israel's interest to assume that he was spiritually blind. Had he, oblivious of his own first principles, sought for God in himself, the search, *from his own point of view*, would have been futile. For even now, after all these centuries of scientific effort and achievement, there is no science of the inner life. Where, then, was God to be found? Poetry can discern the presence of God in and through and beyond the outward and visible world.

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Theology can not. For theology is the outcome of the desire to know *about* God ; and what can we know about the outward world except its phenomena and its laws ? But it was in an instinctive protest against the apparent reality of physical phenomena and the apparent supremacy of physical law that Israel's quest of God, like every other quest of God, had its origin. Neither in the outer world, nor in the inner life of man, was the God of whom Israel dreamed to be sought for. Where, then, was His dwelling-place ? Not in Nature, as Israel would have understood the word if he had ever thought of using it ; but in the world above Nature, in the world to which Christian theology has given the name Supernatural.

Thus the first-fruit of the desire to know about God is dualism. The Universe (to use the most comprehensive of all words) is riven asunder. Here we have Nature—inward and outward—the world of which man has experience. There we have the Supernatural, the world of which man can have no experience, and which therefore lies beyond the horizon of his thought. Between these two a great gulf, unfathomable and impassable, is fixed. Nothing

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less than this could keep the two worlds apart. If there were *natural* intercourse between them, Nature would have overflowed into the Supernatural, and the two worlds would be in danger of becoming one. Nature is entirely divorced from the Supernatural, and entirely bereft of God's presence. But why has God withdrawn Himself from Nature? Really, because Israel, who dreaded nothing so much as the burden of his own potential divinity, found it needful, for his peace of mind, that God should retire to another world. But, nominally, because in the beginning of things Nature, in the person of man, disobeyed God and forfeited His favour. The consequence of this primal act of disobedience is that Nature is now under a curse. Inward Nature—the heart of man—is full of wickedness. Outward Nature—the visible world—is full of labour and misery. And God, all the while, is in Heaven, in the supernatural world. What remedy is there for this state of things? Man cannot climb up into Heaven, but God, who is presumably all-powerful, can, of His own good pleasure, come down to earth. But what will be the signs of His advent? The world that centres in His being is, *ex*

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*hypothesi*, supernatural ; and as Nature has nothing in common with the Supernatural, it is clear that what we call "the course of Nature" is not the expression of the Divine Will. But if there is nothing divine in the normal flow of Nature, must we not conclude that God will announce His coming by causing the waters of Nature to depart from their wonted channel,—in other words, by thwarting the tendencies of Nature and suspending the operation of her laws ?

This general idea of miraculous intervention will express itself in various ways. Revelation will be conceived of as a definite act ; inspiration as a quasi-material process. A particular nation—Israel himself—will be singled out as God's chosen people. Special men and special orders of men—lawgivers, priests, "doctors," and the like—will be set apart to receive and guard the secrets which have been supernaturally communicated by God to man, to dole out the Divine grace, to formulate and interpret the Divine will. For the special revelation which Israel conceived of must needs take a practical form. Submission to God's will is the first and last duty of man. But what is God's

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will, and who will declare it unto man? The will of God is *not* written in man's heart. This essentially atheistic postulate is of the essence of Judaism. There is nothing in human nature that responds to God's message. The heart of man, ruined by the Fall, is "desperately wicked;" and wickedness blinds the inward eye. It does not belong to man either to discern God's will or to desire to do it. The will of God must be communicated by God Himself to a chosen lawgiver, who will write it down as it is dictated to him, and deliver it—not to mankind at large, but to the chosen people—as a series of detailed enactments, as a formulated code of law. And inasmuch as the Law, though the expression of God's will, is not, according to the postulate of supernaturalism, intrinsically attractive, as there is no message in it which the heart instinctively hails as divine, the chosen people must be alternately bribed and coerced into obeying it. Their hopes and their fears must be alternately appealed to. External rewards must be promised to the obedient, and external punishments to those who rebel or forget to obey. It was through the medium of the Law, and in

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no other way, that Israel, the rank and file of the nation, came into contact with God. It was through the same medium, and in no other way, that, speaking generally, access to God was to be had. The path of obedience—to literal and mechanical obedience—to a multitude of positive enactments, nine-tenths of which were entirely non-moral, was the only road to Heaven. And the secret of this path was in the keeping of Israel. The rest of the inhabited world, “the nations that had not the Law,” were beyond the pale of salvation. God had not revealed Himself to them, but had left them, for reasons of His own, in the darkness of their misery and sin. There might be poets and prophets among the Gentiles; there might be heroes and sages; there might be righteous men, as the unsophisticated heart judges of righteousness. But all that counted for nothing. The broad fact remained that the Gentiles had not the Law, and that therefore the light of God’s countenance was entirely withdrawn from them.

This, then, was Israel’s solution of the problem that he set himself. The knowledge of God that he sought was to be had, but not

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for the seeking. It was to be given, not won ; given as a free gift by God Himself from beyond the limits of Nature. It was not to be won, it was not even to be sought, by inward and spiritual effort. That he might the more effectually justify himself in his own eyes for not making that dreaded effort, for not following the steep and narrow path of aspiration and soul-growth, Israel laid down, as a general principle, that the path could not, in the nature of things, be followed, that the effort could not be made. The very play of his imagination was dominated by this assumption. Myths, such as those of the Creation and the Fall, grew up in response to the demand that it made upon his mental resources. With desperate tenacity he clung, as for the dear life, to the belief that Nature in general, and human nature in particular, was fallen, ruined, godless, accursed ; that the heart was both blinded and paralyzed by its inborn sinfulness ; that far from being able to desire God or to seek for Him, man—the natural man—was in his very essence an outcast from God's presence and a rebel against God's will.

A dark and dismal doctrine this ; but Israel



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found consolation in it. It justified to the full his spiritual indolence, his reluctance to exercise the divine gift of freedom, and to undertake the serious business of *growing* in grace. Twenty centuries of dogmatic teaching have generated a prejudice in favour of Israel's cherished postulate, which is not easily eradicated. But, when once the prejudice has been eradicated, when once one has recovered the power of criticizing the philosophy of Israel as freely and unreservedly as one criticizes the philosophies of Hellas or of the Far East, one cannot but feel that of all philosophical assumptions the doctrine of the inherent corruption of human nature is one of the most demoralizing and degrading. Because Israel—the representative and spokesman for all time of those who shirk the burden of soul-life—found it extremely inconvenient to exercise the higher gifts of his own nature, his will-power, his moral intuition, and his imagination, he must needs persuade himself and others that these gifts were vital attributes of man's corrupt and fallen nature, and that they neither had come from God nor bore witness to His presence. I say nothing as to the insult to man that is

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involved in this conception. Israel insulted human nature on principle, and gloried in doing so. But what of the insult to God? God has presumably created Nature; but His handiwork, as Israel conceived of it, was a failure from the outset, and when it went astray He withdrew Himself from it and left it to its own devices. If Israel's estimate of its present condition is correct, the only fruit of God's creative energy is a world of darkness, misery, and sin. And now that God has retired from Nature, what kingdom remains for Him to govern? Human nature, up to its highest developments and manifestations, is bereft of His presence. So is the macrocosm, the wonderful and beautiful world in the midst of which man finds himself. There remains the supernatural Heaven. But what conception did Israel form of that shadowy world? If human love and human wisdom are, in no sense of the word, divine; if the infinite energy, the inexhaustible life and the unfathomable beauty of the outward world do not declare the glory of God; Heaven must be a world in which these vital attributes of "Nature" have no place,—a world which, being unimaginable, in

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any sense of that many-sided word, is therefore, humanly speaking, non-existent. Israel himself knew nothing of the supernatural world which his lack of imagination had created, except that its Lord and Ruler had chosen him for Himself as a peculiar people, and that from it had issued the elaborate code of laws by which he professed to regulate his life. A world which gives no indications of its nature but these, a world which is in no way symbolized by the things that man instinctively regards as highest and best, is surely not the dwelling-place of the Most High God. But apart from that dream-world there is no realm for God to rule over except the land of the Chosen People. There, in Jerusalem, the Holy City, is the Shechinah, or Real Presence of the eternal God. The Cosmos knows nothing of God. The laws of universal Nature are not the expression of His will. But Jerusalem is His dwelling-place, and the letter of the Jewish Law is divine.

It was to these petty limits that Israel narrowed the "kingdom of God." Yet the kingdom, narrow though it was, was not unworthy of its Ruler. That false humility which seeks to glorify God by abasing man defeats its

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own object. The failure of man involves the failure of God; and the degradation of man, who was made in God's image, is accompanied, step by step, by the degradation of his Maker. Whenever Israel's logic got the better of his poetry, the God whom he worshipped shrank to the dimensions of a "non-natural man." Throughout the pages of the Old Testament narrative God moves as a man among men: an Oriental despot, a tribal code-maker, an exacting bargainer, jealous, irascible, vengeful, arbitrary,—nothing but invisibility and miraculous power differentiated Him from the leaders of the people to whom He declared His will. And though Nature was supposed to be divorced from God, it was inevitably narrowed and debased by the processes of thought which had generated so petty and sordid a conception of Deity. A geocentric Universe, a world centring in Jerusalem (which was eventually to evangelize "the Nations" and make them obedient to the Law),—this was the Cosmos, as Israel conceived of it. A corresponding shrinkage took place in the soul of man. The low estimate which Israel found it convenient to form of human nature gave him a spiritual standard to

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which he consistently lived down. The god-like qualities which make for the growth of the soul, the qualities that thrive in the atmosphere of freedom—qualities which Israel, as we have seen, had always refused to exercise—were either banned as rebellious or ignored (with good reason) as non-existent. Obedience to the letter of an elaborate Law was the beginning and end of righteousness; and instead of ascending towards the ideal, the soul descended into what I have called the ever-narrowing vortex of the infinitesimal. The refusal to grow, which was so characteristic of Israel, was producing its natural result. To cease to grow is, in the last resort, to cease to live. The “living soul” was becoming an automaton,—a puppet which would dance, when Israel’s dream was fully realized, as the Master wire-puller ordered its goings.

Let us, however, do justice to Israel. The ascendancy which his sacred writings have exercised over the hearts of so many generations is due to something more than their capacity to minister to an ignoble desire,—the desire to be “saved” by obedience instead of by growth.

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Had Israel preached the gospel of "works" in all its nakedness it would not have won its way among men. The motives of the heart are always mixed and complicated, and one's better self is always at hand, ready to redeem and elevate the lower. The desire to be saved by obedience hides itself behind and even wears the disguise of one of the noblest of all desires,—the desire to devote oneself to the service of God. There is a mighty spiritual poetry in the Old Testament which inflames our hearts and predisposes them to accept and assimilate its formal teaching. If we trace that stream of poetry back to its fountain-head we shall assuredly come to a large and living idea, for it is on the lonely heights of spiritual thought that every master-stream of poetry takes its rise. The greatness of Israel lies in this, that he glorified as no people has ever done, the idea of submission to the Divine Will, and that by conceiving of the Most High as "One God" he gathered all the sub-currents and cross-currents of divine purpose into a single channel of irresistible movement. There are two great strains of poetry in the Old Testament, and they both originate in this one master idea.

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There is the poetry that glorifies the Most High God, and that glorifies obedience to the Law,—not to the Law as such, but to the Law as the expression of the Divine Will. And there is the poetry of revolt, the poetry that dissociates the Law, or, at any rate, the later developments of legalism, from the Divine Will, and that protests against the fruits of the Law in the very name of the righteous God. So long as the idea of submission to the Divine Will was interpreted through the medium of the poetry that it had generated, it was a great and life-giving influence : but it is the descent from poetry to prose and practice that tests the worth of a creed ; and the rapid deterioration that the central idea of Judaism underwent when prosaically handled shows that, even in its poetic prime, it must have been charged with the germs of decay.

That there was an epoch in Israel's life when the Law had a real need to meet and a real function to fulfil, can scarcely be doubted. For Israel, as for every other nation, it was necessary that in his early youth he should be subjected to the strict discipline of a quasi-divine "Law." What differentiates him from

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other nations is that he deified the Law of Moses, not relatively but absolutely, that he conceived of it as the actual work—and the only work of its kind—of the Supreme and Eternal God; and that, as a necessary deduction from this conception, he regarded it as binding upon himself and his posterity for ever, and also as binding upon all men who desired to know and obey God's will. For what is most characteristic of Israel as a thinker is that he conceived of God as one and universal and yet as individual and national. The gods of the Gentiles were for the most part frankly local; but Israel, while proclaiming God as the Lord of the Universe, yet claimed Him as exclusively his own. He undertook to reveal to men the King of Heaven and earth; and when men went to him, as all Christendom has done, to learn his secret, the figure that he unveiled to them was that of the over-lord of a petty state. According as the poetry or the prose of the national life was in the ascendant, so the universal or the national conception of God got the upper hand. After the Exile, with the death of the nation's poetry, the narrower creed won a final triumph. It then



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became possible for the zealous Jew to believe, in all seriousness, that to him alone were committed the oracles of the universal God, and that within the limitless limits of Nature his sacred city was the only dwelling-place of the Most High. Philosophical materialism empties the Universe of God's presence ; but its reason for doing so is that it does not believe in God. To believe in God and yet to withdraw His life and His light from the entire realm of Nature, with the exception of one petty spot on the surface of one of the least of the innumerable stars, is surely a darker and a deadlier atheism. It was to little purpose that Israel preached submission to the Divine Will, when the will to which he would have men submit was confined within the limits of a national code of laws, and incapable of development except in the direction of the infinitesimal. God does not formulate His will (which is ever flowing and "becoming," and therefore incapable of formulation) in a written code of law. He leaves it to us to find out what His will is, by studying the only symbols in which it has ever expressed or will ever express itself,—the central tendencies and paramount laws of Nature ; for He knows that

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the eternal effort to discover the master-law of existence, involving as it needs must do the continuous exercise, on an ever-expanding scale, of will-power, of moral insight, and of creative imagination, will be the chief instrument of man's spiritual growth.

To nationalize or otherwise localize the universal God is to make *spiritual intolerance*—the most anti-human of all moods, for it poisons the very head-springs of brotherly love—a lofty virtue and a solemn duty. Among the Gentiles, whose gods, as I have said, were in the main frankly local, tolerance of the creeds of others was quite compatible with devotion to one's own. But the nation or the institution that believes itself to be in exclusive possession of the oracles of God, must needs regard it as its duty to communicate to the rest of mankind the truth that has been committed to it; and, that being so, we cannot wonder if, when other nations refuse to respond to its teaching, it tries to spread the knowledge of God by fire and sword. There are two great religions whose history has been indelibly stained by wars and persecutions,—Christianity

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and Mohammedanism ; and it is a significant fact that each of these claims to have been supernaturally revealed to man by the one and only God, and that both are offshoots from the parent stem of Judaism. And though Israel himself, in his dealings with other nations, has been doomed to suffer rather than inflict persecution, the passive and essentially selfish intolerance which has always made him shrink from contact with the Gentiles, as one shrinks from the touch of an unclean thing, is not less odious than the active intolerance (born of evangelizing zeal) of the Christian or the Moslem. The truth is, that intolerance, whether active or passive, is of the very essence of dogmatism, and that dogmatism is one of the fatal legacies that Israel bequeathed to mankind.

Another and a not less fatal legacy is *materialism*,—the externalization of the inward life, the substitution of mechanical for vital action. The war that Israel, as the champion of the dogmatic principle, waged, or was ready to wage, against freedom of thought, was the outcome and counterpart of a war which he waged in his own inner life. The reason why

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the average man does not wish other persons to think freely is that he does not wish to think freely himself, the effort and the responsibility of doing so being too great for him. It was reluctance to use his own freedom that made Israel first banish from Nature, and then localize (within the limits of Nature), the universal God ; and his vision of God reacted on and intensified the feeling that gave birth to it. For it is by means of a special revelation from beyond the limits of Nature that the universal God is localized in Nature ; and a special revelation, involving as it does an authoritative declaration of what man is to believe and to do, is obviously incompatible with freedom, whether of thought or of action. Now, the difference between freedom and necessity (in the sphere of human life) is the difference between spiritual and material compulsion, between compulsion from within and compulsion from without. When Israel decided to forego his freedom, he decided to place himself under the control of external and quasi-material forces : in other words, he decided to externalize his own inner life and to materialize or quasi-materialize the Power or Powers which he recognized as supreme. The freedom of

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## God the Lawgiver

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man is entirely compatible with the paramount and all-pervading control of God, so long as God is conceived of as (under one of His manifestations) the spirit that dwells in man's heart: for in the light of that conception, constraint by the Divine Will is seen to be equivalent to constraint by one's own higher and better self; and to be self-constrained is, obviously, to be free. The presence of God in the inner life and the pressure of God on the soul are realized by him who experiences them, not as irresistible and quasi-physical compulsion, but as spontaneous spiritual energy—in other words, as free-will and free-thought. But the tremendous demands upon one's mental and spiritual resources which this theory of God and man involves is one to which Israel was unwilling to respond. The price that he had to pay for evading the burdensome prerogative of freedom—the materialization of himself and of God—was a heavy one, but he paid it with fanatical joy. His weakness, as he yielded to it, became a sacred principle, and his loss of faith, a solemn creed; both creed and principle being worked out by him with characteristic thoroughness into their last and most fatal

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consequences. That nothing might be left to his own initiative he conceived of himself as clay in the hands of the Potter ; and that he might complete the circle of his materialism he fashioned the Potter in the image of himself.

Thus there were at least two main directions in which Israel's conception of a God who was at once universal and local was predestined to develop. The first was that of dogmatic intolerance, which is the negation of brotherly love. The second was that of materialism, which is the negation of spiritual life. The confluence of these two streams of tendency gives us Pharisaism. This fact is the full and final condemnation of the philosophy of Israel. If a tree is to be judged by its fruits, then it must have been an evil tree which bore, when fully developed, so poisonous a fruit as the Pharisaic scheme of life. We have seen that Christ, whose heart overflowed with love, and who looked on moral transgression with pity rather than anger, hated Pharisaism with a stern and unswerving hatred ; and we can now understand why he did so. He hated it, not because of the vices that it deliberately fostered or the immorality that it indirectly countenanced, but

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because it was the elaboration in theory and the embodiment in practice of a corrupt principle ; because it was the natural and inevitable outcome of a radically false conception of God, of Nature, and of Man. *φθείρεται ἡ ἀρχή*. No sterner sentence of condemnation can be pronounced than this. And though the words, as Aristotle uses them, express complete demoralization, there is no scheme of life to which they apply so fully as to the strict morality of the Pharisees.

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## CHAPTER IV—God the Father

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**P**HARISAISM was the poisonous fruit of an evil tree. The branch system of that tree was, in a word, legalism ; the stem, supernaturalism ; the root system, the spiritual indolence of the average man.

The paramount desire of the average man is to be "saved," in defiance of Nature's deepest and widest law, by obedience instead of by growth. He wishes to gain God's favour by obeying, literally and mechanically, His formulated commandments instead of by fulfilling his own spiritual destiny, or, in other words, by growing towards the perfection of which he is capable,—growing in response to the persistent stress of inward and spiritual forces analogous to those which transmute the seed into the sapling, and the sapling into the tree. Out of this desire springs another,—the desire to attain to knowledge of God's nature and will, not by growing into living contact with that supreme truth which is but another name for supreme



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reality, but by having theological and ethical "information" communicated to him from without. In response to this dual desire creeds and codes are provided for him; and sincere and uncompromising devotion to creeds and codes leads at last to Pharisaism, and to no other goal.

Christ denounced Pharisaism with uncompromising vehemence; but he did so, not merely for the pleasure of attacking a glaring evil, but also in order that a high ideal, the vision of which inspired his own heart, might shine out from behind the dark clouds of Pharisaic dogmatism and formalism and pour its light into the hearts of men. The true prophet is never a mere iconoclast. His mission is to build up as well as to destroy. Christ had no *system* to offer as an alternative for Pharisaism. He had but little faith in systems, which, as he saw clearly, are incompatible with freedom and life. But he had an alternative to offer for the false *idea*—the false conception of God—from which Pharisaism had sprung. That conception was compounded of three elements—*dogmatism*, *supernaturalism*, and *pessimism*. To the dogmatism of Israel's philosophy Christ opposed, in

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the region of thought a wise *agnosticism*, in the region of emotion a living *faith*. To its supernaturalism he opposed the higher *pantheism*. To its pessimism the *optimism* of serene peace and radiant joy.

The connexion between dogmatism and supernaturalism is so close and vital that the two may be regarded, for all practical purposes, as constituting one master-tendency of thought. Israel desired to know all that was to be known about God, not from loving interest in the divine nature, not from imaginative curiosity, but solely in order that he might find out, at the least possible expenditure of spiritual energy, what God wished him to believe and to do. This desire led him to banish God from his own heart, so that God's message might come to him from beyond the horizon of his own life; might come to him, clear, precise, intelligible, authoritative, as a truth which he could not discern for himself, as a law which had to be imposed upon him from without. But in banishing God from his own heart Israel banished Him also from Nature (the horizon of which coincides, when viewed from man's standpoint, with the ideal horizon of human

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life), so that the message for which he waited had to come to him at last from a quarter which, as he fondly imagined, must needs disarm criticism and compel conviction,—from the *supernatural* world.

Equally close and equally vital is the connexion between the higher agnosticism and the higher pantheism. Agnosticism is too often confounded with *dogmatic denial* and contrasted with *faith*. In reality it has as little in common with dogmatic denial as with dogmatic affirmation, and it is so far from being antithetical to faith that its very function is to protect faith from the ravaging encroaches of dogmatism. By faith I mean, not the acceptance on “authority” of dogmatic teaching, but the living response made by the soul—by each individual soul—to the living presence of God. As such it must needs vary from soul to soul. If all souls gave exactly the same response to the message that comes to them from within, we should know that it was not their own, that it was not the outcome and expression of their inner lives. The dogmatist wishes all souls to give the same response to God’s silent message,—to give the response, whatever it may be, that

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happens to commend itself to him. He is intolerant of other faiths, nominally because he is zealous for what he calls "the Truth," but really because dissentient opinion makes him distrust himself. He says to his fellow-men, "I know all that is to be known about God. If you do not believe what I tell you, you do not believe in God." He thus interposes himself, so far as he wins acceptance, between the soul and God; and by cutting off the soul, first on the plane of its more conscious life, and then (through the reaction of consciousness on the sub-conscious self) in its hidden depths, from personal intercourse with God, he starves its inner life and so blights and deadens its faith. Agnosticism is, in its essence, a protest against dogmatism *as such*. The protest may be dialectical: it may take the form of a reasoned disproof of the dogmatic position; but in that case the agnostic will run a serious risk of becoming a dogmatist — a negative dogmatist—himself. The higher agnosticism is one of temper rather than of theory. Disdaining to break a lance against this or that dogma, or even against dogmatism as such, it turns its back upon all dogmas, surrounding

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the faith that it guards with the strongest of all ramparts,—with an atmosphere of poetic thought.

In this, the truest sense of the word, Christ, like his great predecessor, the founder of Buddhism, was a consistent agnostic. Though he lived, one might almost say, in the very light of God's presence, and though religious meditation was the very breath of his being, he never allowed himself to dogmatize or even to talk with any approach to precision about God. Knowing that his thoughts about God would not suffer themselves to be translated into speech, he contented himself with expressing his sense of the divine presence in the language of a simple and beautiful poetry, that through that medium some glow of his radiant faith might communicate itself to other hearts. That he spoke with emphasis and conviction is undeniable. But every genuine poet does the same. What constitutes the *differentia* of dogmatism is, not its self-assertion, but its claim to have imprisoned truth (in the case of religious dogmatism, divine truth) in formulæ which are true *as they stand*, however they may be interpreted by those who hear them. The

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attitude of poetry towards its audience is the exact opposite of this. Though the poet, if sincere, always speaks with an air of inspired conviction, he is content to deliver to men just so much truth as each man in turn is able to assimilate from his teaching,—just so much and no more. In other words, dogmatism, whether scientific or pseudo-scientific, is always, on principle, one and the same thing to all men ; whereas it belongs to the essence of poetry to be all things to all men, and yet to give to each man no more than he can claim as his own.

But the poetic agnosticism which was so characteristic of Christ's teaching was in itself the expression of a distinct though indefinable conception of God. Christ did not disprove, he did not even make a formal protest against, dogmatism, but he made it impossible,—impossible for himself, and impossible for all who felt as he did. For he so conceived of God as to flood Nature in general, and the soul of man in particular, with the light of God's presence,—a light which gives life to all on whom it shines, but which blinds the eye that attempts to meet its gaze. Possessed by God's grace and dazzled by God's glory, man cannot study Him with

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quasi-scientific interest, cannot contemplate Him with quasi-scientific curiosity, cannot even speak about Him except in the agnostic language of inspiration, of prophecy, of poetry. But the philosophy that floods Nature with God's presence coincides in the last resort with the philosophy that deifies Nature as the living Whole. In other words, the higher agnosticism and the higher pantheism are one.

We are coming nearer than we have yet done to the creed of Christ. What was negative in that creed had its counterpart in a supreme affirmation; what was vague in the stress of an overwhelming faith. For Christ, as for his brother agnostic, the founder of Buddhism,<sup>1</sup> God was the all-enfolding, all-pervading, all-sustaining, all-inspiring life, in which we and all other things live and move and have our being. The desire to know about that universal life (as a chemist knows about

<sup>1</sup> The founder of Buddhism said little or nothing about God, but he believed in the Divine Life. To enter Nirvana (the Buddhist "Kingdom of Heaven") is to become conscious, really and fully, of one's fundamental oneness with the universal life. Christ's sense of oneness with the All-Father was essentially Nirvanic.

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the elements of material things) had led men to separate it, first from themselves, that their minds might become conscious of it, and then from Nature ; had led them to drive it into the splendid exile of a supernatural heaven, leaving the world of Nature darkened and blighted by its absence ; had led them, in the selfish despair of their hearts, to call God back to earth, but through a supernatural channel which could not be used by the natural man ; had led them to conceive of a special revelation, of a special covenant, of a chosen people, of a chosen priesthood, of a divinely formulated law ; had led them into that jungle of dogmatism, where grow all the parasitic plants (twining round the stem of religion and exhausting its life) which Christ hated so fiercely,—sacerdotalism, formalism, materialism, literalism, casuistical evasion, separatism, intolerance, uncharitableness, cant, hypocrisy, spiritual pride ; had led them at last to drive bargains with their imaginary God, to buy salvation in the cheapest market, to get their religion done for them by contract, to substitute mechanical obedience for aspiration, legal obligation for love, the “lowest tender” for the highest ideal, bondage to the letter for



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freedom in the spirit, automatism for initiative, machinery for life. Seeing that all this was the inevitable outcome of the desire to know about God, Christ determined that knowledge of the divine nature should be subordinated to communion with the divine soul. Christ saw that God must at all costs be brought back to Nature, but he saw also that He must first of all be brought back to his own and to every other human heart. Let God be conceived of as the true self of Man, as the eternal source of the light that lightens, and the life that inspires him from within; and two things will happen. Dogmatism will become both needless and impious; for the dogmatic attitude implies separation from God, and separation from the true self is the beginning and end of

sin. And supernaturalism will wither at its root; for Man is the Alpha and Omega of Nature (as he understands the word), and the divine light that glows through his being will sooner or later irradiate every existent thing.

In order to bring God back to Nature and

to Man Christ had recourse to two correlated conceptions, the conception of God as the Father, and the conception of God as the Father.

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indwelling Spirit. The conception of God as the Father is as profound as it is simple, and as true as it is beautiful. Handled as Christ handled it, it affords convincing proof that poetry is more philosophical than philosophy itself. Two things are of the essence of fatherhood,—the communication of life, and the outpouring of love. In the case of an earthly father the life is communicated to a few children, and the love is poured out for a few fleeting years. But God is the All-Father and the eternal Father ; and the outflow of His life and of His love knows no bounds and no breaks. It follows that the inwardness, the immanence of God is the very counterpart and correlate of His fatherhood. He who at all times and in all places is pouring out life and love in “steady and limitless floods” must needs be one, fundamentally one, with all existent things. For as the outflow of life and love which makes the world what it is, and all things in it what they are, is of the very essence of the Divine Being, it may surely be said that God is in all things, and that all things live in Him. At any rate, this was the view of God’s presence which was taken by

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Christ. The Creator who could call the world into being, endow it with self-renewing materials and energies, and then leave it to its own devices, did not exist for him. He was conscious, and he wished all men to become conscious, of oneness with the Father ; and he saw the same divine life in all outward things. There is nothing so lowly, nothing so trivial, but it is near and dear to God. Two sparrows are sold for a farthing, but they do not fall to the ground without God's knowledge. The very hairs of our head are numbered. It follows, *a fortiori*, that the beauty of the visible world is of God, nay, that it is the very glow of the divine life and the divine love suffusing the veil of outward things. The lilies toil not, neither do they spin, and yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. From what is outermost in outward Nature to what is innermost in the soul of Man, whatever is pleasant, whatever is beautiful, whatever is good is a thrill of the one life and a gleam of the one light :—

“I am the fresh taste of the water ; I  
The silver of the moon, the gold of the sun.

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. . . I am the good sweet smell  
Of the moistened earth. I am the fire's red light,  
The vital air moving in all what moves,  
The holiness of hallowed souls, the root  
Undying, whence hath sprung whatever is ;  
The wisdom of the wise, the intellect  
Of the informed, the greatness of the great,  
The splendour of the splendid . . .  
These am I, free from passion and desire ;  
Yet am I right desire in all who yearn."

A strong and persistent vein of pantheism runs through this conception of the fatherhood of God. But it is the higher pantheism, not the lower. The materialism which professes to deify Nature, but which means by Nature nothing more than the physical plane, the outward aspect of existence, and which therefore regards all visible things as fully and equally divine, was very far removed from Christ's thought. The conception of God as Christ's Father was balanced in his mind as the Father sort elucidated—balanced and in some the indwelling by the conception of God as seen by Spirit. It is not the Universe the Universe seen as it really is, seen as God it, seen, in the unity and totality of its

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all-pervading life, by the all-seeing eye of the all-sustaining Soul. It is not until we can see the Universe as it really is that we are free to identify it with God. But if we are to see the Universe as it really is we must look within. The highest and best thing that Man knows of is his own ideal self. Primarily, then, and also finally, man must seek for God in his own soul. If and so far as he can find God there he will find Him elsewhere ; and the nearer he grows, by the expansion and evolution of his own inner life, to the God within, the wider is the world that he sees to be illuminated by God's presence. When the unattainable goal has been reached, when man has become what he really is, has found his true self, then and not till then is he free to say, "I am one with the All-Father, and therefore at last I am I" ; and then, and not till then, is he able to realize that the Universe, the All of Being, is divine. For if God the Father is the true life of Nature, God the indwelling Spirit is the true self of man ; and as the Father and the indwelling Spirit are one God, so are the true life of Nature and the true self of man one life and one self.

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Such was the conception of God that Christ opposed to the supernaturalism of Israel. It revealed God to man under an entirely new aspect. For Israel God was, in His essence, a God of wrath, an omnipotent despot who looked with vindictive disfavour on the whole human race, with the exception of one petty nation, and even to that nation dispensed, not spontaneous love but "covenanted mercies,"—rewards which had been duly earned by fidelity to the terms of a quasi-mercantile bargain. For Christ God was, in His essence, the God of love. In restoring God to Nature, in conceiving of Him as the life and soul of the universe, as the vital stream that thrills and vibrates through the universal frame, Christ revealed Him to man as the eternal fountain-head of love. For what do we know of love except that it is, first, the response of the heart to attractive force, and then a counter-attractive force which draws the Beloved into the Lover's arms? What do we know of love except that it is the force, at once active and passive, by which all things attract one another, by which each thing is drawn out of itself into oneness with other things, by which all things are drawn

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out of themselves into oneness, first with one another, and then with the living Whole? And if love is indeed the unifying, the centripetal principle in Nature, shall we not say of Him who makes all things one, whose one life is in all things, whose immanent presence transmutes what else were a chaotic aggregate into an organic whole,—shall we not say of the God whom Christ revealed to us that love is of His essence, that love is His life? Christ was conscious that through love, through the eternal reciprocity of love, he was one with the Father; and he instinctively argued from this that love was the bond which linked all things to God, that love was the force which made the Universe divine.

In restoring God to Nature, in flooding Nature with the light of love, Christ lifted from the world the curse which supernaturalism had laid upon it. Supernaturalism expected the world to be perfect because God—who is presumably a perfect being—had created it, made it what it is; and finding that it was imperfect, came to the superficially logical conclusion that it had fallen from its high estate through some fault of its own, and was lying under a curse.

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The philosophy of Israel was, as we have seen, profoundly pessimistic. It was not merely as a logical inference from the premises of supernaturalism, but as a welcome relief from the burden of his own spiritual obligation, that he accepted the doctrine of the Fall. That he might feel fully convinced of his own spiritual helplessness, he conceived of himself as by birth and inheritance "desperately wicked," and that he might the more effectually safeguard this cherished conception, he made all Humanity and all Nature share in his ruin and his shame. To withdraw God, who is presumably the one eternal source of truth, of beauty, of goodness, of joy, from the entire realm of inward and outward Nature, is to sound the lowest imaginable depth of pessimism. Looking, from the standpoint of his own soulless egotism, on the bright and beautiful world that surrounded him—on the majesty and splendour of Nature, on the virtue and heroism of Man—Israel could see nothing but darkness and evil, nothing but the cankering blight of God's curse, nothing but the lurid menace of His wrath. Christ saw that the imperfection of the world was due to its immaturity, to its being still but partially



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developed (the process of its evolution being eternal), and that all its evils and miseries were quite compatible with the immanence of the Divine Spirit and the eternal efflux (and influx) of the divine life and love. Hence his immense and overmastering optimism. Sin and sorrow abound in the world, but God's love abounds in the world also, and will sooner or later overcome sin and sorrow by absorbing them into itself. For sin and sorrow, as Man has experience of them, are the outcome of his partial separation from God, and this again is due to his immaturity, to the undeveloped state of his soul. *Æons* may pass before the soul of this man or of that can expand to the stature of Christ's, and become conscious of its oneness with the Father; but the steady attractive force of the divine love will sooner or later bear down all opposition, and draw all souls into the vortex of the divine life.

It was his clear perception of the temporal and provisional character of evil that made Christ so tolerant of sin and so free from misgiving in the presence of sorrow and pain. Israel had committed the fatal mistake of regarding evil, which is essentially a negation, as

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a positive reality, in fact, as the only thing that is real in Nature. Christ saw that behind the dark clouds of evil there is the sunshine, and between them the blue sky ; and he saw that whereas the clouds are petty and perishable, mere fleeting exhalations from the surface of the earth, the blue sky is boundless and unfathomable, and the sunshine an emanation from the very head-springs of light and life. He saw, in other words, that there *is* goodness in the corrupt heart of man, beauty in fallen Nature, happiness in the suffering world ; and that these things—goodness, happiness, and beauty—are positive and real, things to cling to and trust in and live for, whereas

“ the evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound.”

If Israel saw no trace of God in the Universe, Christ, on the contrary, saw (in the last resort) nothing but God in it ; for in his eyes whatever was not of God was unreal, accidental, provisional, and would sooner or later pass away like a forgotten dream. With a daring optimism, compounded in equal degrees of imagination, faith, and joy, he conceived of the entire “ course of things,” both in its general movement and

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in all its details, as under the control and care of One whose whole being radiated love. Familiarity with this conception—a familiarity which is quite compatible with inability to realize its meaning—has blinded us both to its originality and to its grandeur. The change from the midnight gloom of Israel's pessimism to the cloudless sunshine of Christ's optimistic faith is perhaps the greatest revolution in human thought that a single mind has ever achieved. Or, if there is a greater, it is the revolution of which this was at once a vital aspect and a necessary result,—the restoration by the same master-mind of the Divine Presence to the heart of Nature and to the soul of Man.

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## CHAPTER V—The Kingdom of God

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**D**EVOTION to the service of God the Lawgiver was to be rewarded, in the last resort, by the establishment of the "Kingdom of God," or "Kingdom of Heaven," among men.

It was a dark and desolate world that met the gaze of the pious Jew in the ages that preceded the birth of Christ. Beyond the frontiers of his own nation there was no one, to speak broadly, who had any knowledge of God. And though his own nation had in the main been loyal to the Divine Lawgiver,<sup>1</sup> it had not reaped the reward of its obedience. The days of its glory were no more. Its power, its wealth, its freedom had departed; and, as the crown of its sorrow, it was ruled and oppressed by a heathen state. With nothing to console him in the present, it was but natural that Israel, still trusting in the supposed promises of God, should look forward with eager expectation to the future. A grandiose dream, which took

<sup>1</sup> At any rate, since the return from exile.

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innumerable forms, but preserved its identity through them all, had long been in possession of his soul. On some future day, perhaps not far distant, the reign of Satan on earth would come to an end, and the Messiah, a divinely commissioned ruler of superhuman wisdom and power, would establish the Kingdom of Heaven among men. A new Jerusalem would take the place of the old, and the "nations" would be ruled by Israel and taught by him to know and obey God. When that "great day" came the faithful who had died would rise from the grave and live again in bodily form on earth, and there receive at God's hands the rewards which they had earned by obedience to the Law. Thus the Kingdom of Heaven was for Israel a supernatural order of things which would descend upon earth on some future day, and the establishment of which would involve the sudden and complete abolition of the natural order. The leading feature of the new order would be a carnival of legality. The Law would be known to and obeyed by all men, and the reward of this world-wide obedience would be the cessation of pain and sorrow, and the triumph of happiness and peace.

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In this dream the spiritual egotism of Israel touched high-water mark, and his audacious attempt to nationalize the Universal God achieved its last and most characteristic result. So entirely had he (as he arrogantly imagined) monopolized the divine favour, that his downfall as a nation could be accounted for only on the theory that God, for purposes of His own, had allowed the Prince of Darkness to rule over the earth. And so impossible was it for God to hold intercourse with man through any channel but the national life of the Chosen People, that only by means of the apotheosis of Israel could the Kingdom of Heaven be established among men. This selfish<sup>1</sup> and vain-glorious dream has, as might have been expected,

<sup>1</sup> Not wholly or even mainly selfish, so long as Israel was able to believe that the rest of mankind could be saved through his agency. But the spiritual egotism, which was of the essence of the Messianic dream, easily degenerated into selfishness of the most pronounced type. The writer of the Apocalypse is well content to believe that only a small remnant of faithful Jews will be saved, and that the rest of mankind will be irretrievably lost; and there are Christian Sects, even in our own day, in which this inhuman attitude towards God and Man is faithfully reproduced. How much more Christlike is the aspiration of the Chinese Sage: "Never will I enter into final peace alone, but always and everywhere will I suffer and strive until all enter with me"!

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been the delight and solace of all on whom the mantle of Israel's spiritual egotism has fallen. From the Church of Rome down to the least of the Protestant communities, each section and sub-section of Christendom has entered into the spirit of the dream, with the result that each in turn is ready to believe that through its agency, and in no other way, will the redemption of Mankind be effected. The individualist in religion goes even further than this. For him the letter of Messianic prophecy is of more importance than the spirit. The fantastic details in which the decadent imagination of Israel ran riot all minister to his spiritual self-esteem. He is ready to enroll himself in the limited company of the "elect," and even to invest himself with high office in the coming Messianic reign.

For Christ, as for Israel, devotion to the service of God was to be rewarded by the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven among men. But the kingdom of which he dreamed had as little in common with the outward, visible, temporal, and supernatural kingdom of which Israel dreamed as God the Father had in common with God the Lawgiver.

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Nothing shows more clearly how spiritually unintelligent were the followers of Christ than their utter inability to explain to us what their Master meant by the "Kingdom of God." That he himself distrusted their spiritual understanding and their intellectual sympathy is proved by the fact that he wrapped up his teaching on this subject in parables of a peculiarly cryptic type. If these parables are to yield up their inner meaning, we must interpret them by the light of the general conception that we have formed of Christ's aims and ideals. The Messianic dream was the direct and inevitable outcome of the same tendencies of thought and feeling which had produced the Pharisaic scheme of life. In Pharisaism the national ideal found practical, in the Messianic dream imaginative, expression. Also, it was by Pharisaic strictness of life that the right to share in the resurrection of the dead and to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven was to be earned. As Pharisaism was the one and only thing that Christ actively hated, we may be sure that the Messianic idea was entirely repugnant to his way of thinking, and that his Kingdom of Heaven was fundamentally antithetical



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to the kingdom of which Israel dreamed. But in this, as in certain other matters, Christ thought it wiser to utilize existing forces than to dissipate their energy and his own in the shock of a direct collision. Accepting what was good in the Messianic dream—the desire for and faith in the advent of better and happier times—Christ sought to divert this desire and this faith into another channel. The Messianic dream was the outcome of a struggle between Israel's literal trust in the promises of his supernatural God and his atheistical distrust of Nature. The world, as he saw it, was bereft of God's presence, and, except for a miracle, was irredeemably evil. But that state of things could not last for ever. Sooner or later, if God's promises were to be fulfilled, the reign of Satan would be ended, and the Kingdom of God would come upon earth. The premises from which Christ started were the very negation of those from which Israel had evolved his fantastic hope. The world, as Christ saw it, was under the rule, not of Satan, but of God ; while Nature, both inward and outward, far from being irredeemably evil, was animated and illuminated by the Divine

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Presence, and was therefore "very good." That being so, to look forward to the advent of the Kingdom of God as to a future event was a waste of hope and a misuse of faith. The Kingdom was already in our midst; and all that men needed to do in order to hasten its advent was to realize its presence. The establishment of the Kingdom among men was indeed to be brought about by the restoration of God to Nature. On that point Christ was in accord with Israel. But the restoration of God to Nature was to take place, not, as Israel imagined, on some future day and as a visible pageant, but now and for ever in the timeless and spaceless region of imaginative thought. Nor was it to be effected by the de-naturalization—the phantasmagorical transformation—of Nature, but by the recognition of God's immanent presence as the only source of Nature's light and life.

When once we have grasped this conception the parables will begin to disclose their meaning, and the outlines of the Kingdom will emerge from the darkness in which Christ found it needful to shroud them.

The Kingdom of God is, in the first place,

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the kingdom of soul-life, the kingdom of the realized presence of God in the soul of man. It has no limits, either temporal or spatial. It is here, if anywhere. It is now, if it shall ever be. Not the new Jerusalem is its capital, but the regenerate heart of man. We do not wait for its advent. It "cometh not by observation." It is "within us" (or "in the midst of us"). When we pray, as Christ taught us to pray, that it may "come," we are praying that we may realize, each for himself, its hidden presence.

Again, the Kingdom of God is the kingdom of intrinsic reality. The final criterion, the final standard, the final measure of reality belongs to it, and to it alone. By reference to its hidden treasure all other ends, all other prizes, all other joys, are as shadows and dreams. When a man has found its pearl of great price, he will sell all that he has in order that he may acquire that inward prize. What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose—that is, fail to find—his own soul? The Kingdom of God immingles itself with the kingdom of the world.<sup>1</sup> It is always in the

<sup>1</sup> By "the world" Christ always means the superficial life of man.

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midst of it, always interpenetrating it, always judging it. Things are what they are. Appearances count for nothing. "Quantum unusquisque est in oculis Tuis tantum est et non amplius." The tares may for a time be indistinguishable from the wheat. But in the day of judgment, the timeless day when reality is tested and measured, the tares will be known as tares, and the wheat as wheat. For in that day the despotism of custom will be overthrown and the hollowness of opinion will be exposed. It will be vain for the man who is judged to plead his position, his reputation, his influence, his authority. Even his "good works" will be resolved into their inward and spiritual elements, and estimated in terms of these. One question only will be asked of the man, one question only is eternally asked of every man, What measure of growth, of Godward movement, has his soul made?

For, above all, the Kingdom of God is the kingdom of soul-growth. Mighty and mysterious forces are at work in it, forces akin to those that leaven the measure of meal or that expand the seed into the branching tree,—forces that are transforming each individual soul by a

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process of natural evolution into its own true self, into oneness with the indwelling spirit of God. And not the individual soul only, but also the general soul of man. The law of growth is the master law of Nature's being, and therefore the master law of human life. To grow in grace, to realize the divine potencies of one's nature, to become the God that one really is (though now "in the germ"), to earn the right to say, "I and my Father are one,"—this is the Kingdom of God, and this is the whole duty of man.

Lastly, the Kingdom of God is open to all men. The least and lowliest of us is a ray of the divine light. The chosen people is not Israel but Humanity. God is the All-Father, "the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world." Within the illimitable limits of the inward kingdom "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free;" for God "is all and in all."

Thus, whereas for Israel the Kingdom of God was outward, visible, supernatural, and temporal, for Christ it was inward, spiritual, natural, and eternal. And whereas the Messianic dream was Israel's materialistic antidote to the

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pessimism of his faithless creed, Christ's dream of the Kingdom of God on earth was and is the spontaneous outwelling in his heart, and in the hearts of all who respond to his message, of a secret fountain of triumphant faith. It was this, and more than this. It was the actual sense of the Divine Presence. It was the very glow of the Divine Love.

Let us now ask ourselves how Christ's conception of God and of the Kingdom of God would be likely to express itself in the notation of human conduct. The practical expression of that "theory of things" which gave birth to the Messianic dream was, as we have seen, Pharisaism. What kind of life would man lead if he were to dream Christ's dream of an inward and spiritual Heaven,—in other words, if he were to realize that his true self is divine? In the first place, what conception of duty would he form? The answer to this question is not far to seek. God is the ideal self of man because He is the ideal end, the *τέλος τελειότατον* of Nature's infinite and eternal movement. Now the sense of duty is the sense of the constraining influence exercised by the

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central laws and forces of Nature upon the life and character of each individual man; for what is destiny for *all* becomes duty for *each*, the "is" of universal Nature changing itself, as it passes through the refracting medium of consciousness, into the "ought" of the individual life. It follows from these premises that the duty of man is to find his higher self, to grow towards the spiritual perfection of which his nature is capable, to become one spirit with God.

It is easy to see that this conception of duty will profoundly affect morality. Righteousness as Israel conceived of it, is an entirely unnatural and even anti-natural mode of life, which has to be imposed upon man from without by the despotic action of the supernatural God. Righteousness, as Christ conceived of it, is no veneer laid by a skilful artificer upon the base substance of man's heart, but an end which is as entirely congenial to man's nature as is the flavour of a peach to the nature of a peach-tree or the perfume of a full-blown rose to the nature of a rose-bush. (An end, and a process. The strength of Christ's theory of life is that the end at which he would have us aim is simply

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the natural consummation of the process by which it is to be realized ; or rather the end *is* the process—summed up in and justified by the last term in its infinite “series.”) By thus substituting a natural for a supernatural motive, Christ frees man from a hateful bondage (for the Law is, *ex hypothesi*, repugnant to his nature), and presses all his higher energies into the service of right. The Law appeals to his individual selfishness, and it is not to be blamed for doing so ; but it taps it in a stratum which lies below the level of morality,—the stratum of mundane hopes and carnal fears. Christ teaches man that his interest coincides, in the last resort, with his duty ; that he is to *be* good in order that he may *become* good,—goodness, or the fulfilment of the master law of one’s nature, being as obviously the supreme source of happiness in man as in every other living thing. He thus appeals to motives which are at once disinterested and self-regarding—in other words, which are at once pure and strong ; and the outcome of his appeal, in those who respond to it, is that the self-seeking instincts of man’s nature, instincts which must be appealed to if he is to be stimulated to action, are induced



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to forswear the service of the lower self and enlist under the banner of God.

This is the *first* service that Christ renders to morality. The *second* is not less important. As Christ sets before man a new end of action, so he sets before him a new way of acting. As he transforms his motive, so he transforms his method. The glory of God, which is presumably the end of all action, is but another name for the ideal perfection of man. In order to reach this end, one must raise continuously the plane of one's life ; one must move forward from point to point the centre of one's interests and affections ; one must go on from self to self, from stepping-stone to stepping-stone, from strength to strength ; one must submit, not once only, but again and again, to be born anew ; in fine, one must die to the lower self—die to it perpetually, for the series of its phases is infinite—and live to the higher self and to God. Thus soul-growth or spiritual development holds under the Gospel the place which mechanical obedience held under the Law. And to soul-growth there are two sides,—self-sacrifice which is attended with pain, the pain of suppressing the lower self and denying it the

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fruit of its desires ; and soul-expansion, which is attended with joy, the joy of breathing a purer air and energizing on a higher plane and on a larger scale.

The difference between the method of the Law and the method of the Gospel is too deep to be fathomed. Obedience presupposes guidance from without. Except this be given to it, except a code of commandments—peremptory, definitive, authoritative—be set before it, it avails us nothing ; it is, as it were, a door to which there is no key. For the path of spiritual development, on the other hand, no guidance is required except what comes from within,—the guidance of Nature, which is given to all of us in proportion as we ask for it, accept it, use it. All that is needed for the effective application of this method is to be able to distinguish between higher and lower ; and the knowledge of this distinction, like the distinction itself, is objectively present, in all its variety and subtlety, in the being of man. In other words, man has the rule of right and wrong in his own breast. In himself, in his inner life, the higher self is superior to the lower, and is ever ready to assert itself as such

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if he will but listen to its voice. Its effort to assert itself puts a pressure upon his nature which is realized by him as the constraining influence of conscience, and which as certainly makes for righteousness as every process of growth in plant or animal makes for the well-being and well-doing of the thing that grows.<sup>1</sup>

The weakness, then, of the Jewish morality is that in it the method of righteousness and the power to use the method—the door of salvation and the key that unlocks the door—are not necessarily conjoined. Knowledge of God's will cannot of itself generate obedience except on the supposition that the ends which it sets before men are objects of *natural* desire,—a supposition which manifestly contradicts the doctrine of man's congenital depravity and undermines the idea of a law supernaturally

<sup>1</sup> What is needed for the proper treatment of a moral problem is, first and foremost, a knowledge of one's own motives and spiritual circumstances, a knowledge which must be close, subtle, and continuous, if it is to be adequate to its subject-matter, and which is therefore almost as incommunicable and unformulable as the physiological knowledge which enables a man to make a proper use of his nerves and muscles and limbs. Ethical knowledge of this kind is objectively present in the heart and mind; and if it be wanting, there is nothing that can take its place.

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delivered and despotically enforced. Nor can obedience generate a knowledge which, according to the primary postulate of legalism, comes to man only from without, and comes to him, not as instinct and inspiration, but as a network of formulated rules.

It is otherwise with the morality of the Gospel. In this the method, as we have seen, is that of self-development ; and self-development has its counterpart in self-sacrifice or the surrendering of a lower good in order to gain a higher. Now the higher good, being presumably an object of natural desire, must be regarded as the source both of knowledge and impulse. It reveals itself to man as being what it is, the nobler end of action, the worthier object of choice ; and in the act of doing so, it sets his desires in motion and diverts his energies from its rival to itself. The impulse that is thus communicated reacts on the knowledge that helped to generate it, the desirability of the higher good becoming more apparent as we approach it ; and is itself as speedily reacted upon, the clearer perception of the object aimed at becoming in its turn a stronger attractive force. Thus there is a ceaseless

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interaction between the two sides of the moral process, what is given as stimulus being received back as knowledge, and what is given as knowledge being received back as stimulus. In other words, the development of the higher self and the illumination of conscience are two aspects of the same inward movement. The door of salvation locks and unlocks itself. The "method" and the "secret" are one.

The *third* service that Christ renders to morality is the extension of its inward scope. The morality that comes from within is governed by living principles. The morality that comes from without is under the despotism of isolated rules. In passing from rules to principles, Christ makes the sphere of moral activity commensurate with the sphere of human life. For whereas a principle can be interpreted, a rule can only be applied; and whereas a principle covers a variety of typical cases, a rule covers only one. Thus the scheme of life that is governed by principles is prepared for any and every case that may arise, whereas the Lawgiver may count himself fortunate if no more than nine cases out of ten escape through the meshes of his network of rules. There is

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a further reason why the morality of Christ should do what that of Israel wrecked itself in a vain attempt to do,—descend into all the details of life. If man be by nature incapable of good, it must surely follow that only that region of his life which admits of being regulated by positive commandments delivered from a supernatural source is amenable to the authority of the moral law. Beyond the boundary of what is dogmatically prescribed, man ceases to be a moral agent, for he does not and cannot know right from wrong. But if morality be naturalized, as it was when Christ recalled God to earth, its limits become coincident, ideally if not actually, with those of Nature herself. Not indeed that, in thus enlarging its dominions, it allows itself to lean with equal weight on all the incidents of life and opportunities of action. On the contrary, it follows the guidance of Nature, who arranges these details, as she arranges all things that belong to her, in the order of their intrinsic dignity and worth. Herein it differs from the old morality, which assumes that all its enactments have equal authority, being all equally divine, and in the strength of this assumption

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“binds heavy burdens and grievous to be borne,” laying as much stress on the most trivial matter of ceremonial punctilio as on the weightiest matter of the moral law. But though the morality of Nature discriminates between detail and detail, it claims supremacy over all. Nothing is common or unclean. The least thing that is done by man tends either to make or to mar the doer; and the difference between these alternatives is the difference between right and wrong. “Whether therefore ye eat or drink or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”

But this is not all. When the last and lowliest detail of life has been brought under the law of right and wrong, a new world begins to disclose itself to the eyes of the moralist. Were it not so, the descent into the details of human conduct would be, as it was under the Law, an ignominious and soul-destroying descent into the infinitesimal. Doing is, after all, only one of the many modes of spiritual activity. Behind and beyond a man's deeds are the inward sources of his action,—his thoughts, his feelings, his desires. These too, which were for obvious reasons ignored by legalism, come

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under the authority of the morality of Nature. Inward and ever inward, as it follows the action back to its fountain-head, the new morality advances, step by step, till it comes in sight of that state or aspect of the man to which alone the words *good* and *bad* are finally applicable,—the condition of his soul. It was not for its own sake that Christ was interested in human action, but for the sake of the soul, in which (descending through the channels of thought and feeling) our deeds originate, and on which (transmitting their influence through the media of thought and feeling) our deeds react. In the eyes of the legalist, morality begins and ends in outward action. In the eyes of Christ, it begins and ends in the inner life of the soul.

The *fourth* service that Christ renders to morality is the extension of its outward field. The conception of a natural, as opposed to a supernatural God, gives birth to the idea of Humanity. It does not create the idea. The materials are already in existence. What it does is to gather them together from different quarters and give them cohesion, structure, and life. In this, as in other respects, the teaching of Christ had been to some extent anticipated. The idea of



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Humanity was in the air that he breathed. Circumstances were in its favour. The Roman Empire was calling it into existence. Philosophy, driven inwards by the decay of political life, was beginning to contemplate it. The sentiment of brotherhood, diverted from the channel of patriotism by the march of the Roman legions, was moving in its direction. But Christ, whose work, like that of all great Reformers, was in large measure *mæuitic*, brought the idea, which had long been nascent, to the birth. By transforming the corresponding theory into a belief, and the corresponding sentiment into a passion, he carried it home to men's hearts. And this he did because he reached it by an inference from the central dogma of his creed.

It is easy to show that his logic was not at fault. Both in theory and in practice the idea of universal brotherhood is a necessary deduction from the doctrines of a natural theology. The supernatural God is essentially local in His action. His revelations of Himself are essentially partial and spasmodic, given at particular times and places, designed for the benefit of particular peoples, and entrusted to the keeping

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of particular persons. Miracles, which are presumably exceptional and isolated occurrences, are the recognized signs of His presence. He reveals His will on one of many mountains. His Holy of Holies is on one of many hills. The sphere of His dominion is also the sphere of man's duty. The worship of a common God determines the limits of morality. The duties of the Jew are towards those who go up to Jerusalem. The duties of the Athenian are towards his fellow-citizens, towards those who worship with him at the altars of the civic gods. The Jew distinguishes between his fellow-countrymen and the heathens who have not known Jehovah. If the Athenian, besides distinguishing between citizens and strangers, can also conceive of the Greek as such, and distinguish between him and the Barbarian, that is only because the shrine of Apollo at Delphi is the focus of a quasi-national life. The sentiment of nationality is, in fact, the widest of all the motive forces which the ethics of the supernatural admit of; and if that sentiment should be weakened, either from within or from without, religion and morality alike would be in danger of falling into decay. Rome, animated

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as no people has ever been, by the sense of duty to the commonwealth, conquered city after city and nation after nation, destroying the patriotism of her subjects and gradually diluting her own. In so doing she proved how essentially local—tribal, civic, or national, as the case might be—were the religion and morality of the ages before Christ; for she demoralized the world which she governed, and she filled her Pantheon with dead and dying gods.

It is not until we pass, as Christ did, from a supernatural to a natural conception of God, that universal religion becomes possible, and that the limits of morality become coincident with the limits of the world. The God who dwells beyond the skies rules over a nation or a city or a tribe. The God who sits on the throne of Nature rules over the Universe. Nor does the latter need, what is indispensable to the former, the intervention of miracles (in the supernatural sense of the word) between Himself and the hearts of His children. His revelation of Himself is, in the first place, continuous and universal, the gradual unfolding of His being in and through the evolution of

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Nature and of Man. The means, whatever they may be, by which the education of the human race is being carried on—Art and Science, Poetry and Philosophy, Society and Government—are the true channels of His grace. The sounds that stir us, the words that move us, are the accents of His voice. Beauty, whether inward or outward, is the light of His countenance. The plastic stress of circumstances is the pressure of His hand. His revelation of Himself is, in the second place, individualized in each human breast. As He is the soul of Universal Nature, so He is the true self of each individual man. For each, as for all, the path of self-development, the path of ascent towards the soul's ideal, is the path that leads to God. Thus there are two means of communication between Earth and Heaven. The first is open to all men. The second is open to any man. The first is a road which cannot be avoided. The second is a road which cannot be missed. It is clear, from either point of view, that the God of Nature is also the God of the whole human race. "There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek : for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him." Even the

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distinction between those who consciously worship Him and those who have not called upon His name is one which He refuses to respect. "I was found of those that sought me not. I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me." Thus His Church is catholic and œcumenical in the true sense of those misused words. The believer in the supernatural can never get far beyond the proud boast of Judaism: "The Lord hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto Himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth." The believer in the God of Nature can say, with the greatest of Christ's apostles,—“By one spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free.”

The relation between man and God determines the relation between man and man. We pass, at a single step, from a universal religion to a universal morality. "The spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." But the children of God must needs be the brothers of their fellow men. In other words, the conception of the Fatherhood of God postulates the conception of the brotherhood of Humanity. "Who is my

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neighbour?" is a vital question for each one of us; for duty to one's neighbour is, as it were, the application and embodiment of duty to one's God. The religion of Nature answers the question, as Christ answered it in the parable of the Good Samaritan,—“Your neighbour is your fellow man.” This answer universalizes the scope of morality. It tells us that we are members of a community wider than the family, wider than the tribe, wider than the city, wider than the nation, wider than the empire of Rome,—the community of the human race. If God may be conceived of as the ideal of Humanity, then duty to God must be identified with duty to Man as Man. For to love and worship the ideal is to love and reverence even the least and lowest of those “seeds and weak beginnings” in which it “lies intreasurèd.” It is here, in this eternal procession of philanthropy, or brotherly affection, from the worship of the All-Father, that morality and religion, each of which is in truth the good genius of the other, meet and mingle and flow from henceforth in a single stream.

The *fifth* service that Christ renders to

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morality is the elevation of its ideal. By resolving morality into the inward and spiritual effort which it involves, Christ raises it, as it were, to an infinite power. The man who has to obey the commandments of a formulated code may conceivably "count himself to have apprehended." Each act of obedience is a good thing, perfect as far as it goes; and its doer has the satisfaction of knowing that so much merit stands in perpetuity to the credit of his moral account. To keep all the commandments of the Law is to do all that is required of one; and the man whose conscience is wholly void of offence may fairly claim to have attained to moral perfection. But the man who strives to attain to inward and spiritual perfection knows that he will never reach his goal. Outward performance counts for nothing, when viewed from the inward standpoint, except so far as it reveals and reacts upon the character of the doer. The aim, the aspiration, the effort,—these are the things that the God of Nature regards and values; and to the movement of these there can be no limits, for the force that generates them is an unapproachable and unimaginable ideal. Thus the Religion of Nature

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wages a truceless war against Pharisaic self-satisfaction ; and in so doing, it both safeguards morality on the lowly plane of everyday duty (where confidence is the sure precursor of carelessness), and by lifting it on to higher and still higher planes of action saves it from undergoing that process of degeneration which is the necessary consequence of arrested growth.

The *sixth* and not the least of the services that Christ renders to morality is to invest it with an atmosphere of freedom. The morality that is based on obedience, though suitable for children and for childlike souls, is fatal to soul-growth in its higher stages. For the growth of the soul carries with it the expansion of the *self*, and therefore the progressive enlargement of the sphere of human freedom. I am free when and just so far as my action originates in my soul or true self, and in doing so escapes from the control of material or quasi-material forces and laws. The more I expand my soul, the more do I tend to bring my life and my conduct under the control of my *self*. But freedom, like every other spiritual faculty, is strengthened by use and weakened by neglect. In other words, the more my life, on all



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its planes—speculative, imaginative, emotional, practical—is swayed and directed by my true self, the more fully will my true self unfold and the greater will be its power of swaying and directing my life. Hence the use of the sacred gift of freedom, the cultivation of spontaneity and initiative on all the planes of man's inner life, is one of the most solemn of duties. Freedom cannot be limited, as supernaturalism tries to limit it, to a single channel of choice,—the choice between obedience and disobedience to the commandments of a formulated law. That is the freedom of a child, not of a man. To treat a growing youth as an irresponsible child, and subject him to a *régime* of blind and strict obedience, were to arrest the development of his character. In like manner, to tell the soul that salvation is to be won by obedience, and by no other means, is to invite it to give up the business of growing, and if of growing, then of living, for “whatever has life is characterized by growth, so that in no respect to grow is to cease to live.” The truth is that to prepare the way for the *régime* of freedom is the very function of the *régime* of obedience, and to regard the latter as an end in

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itself is to empty it of its meaning and its purpose, and invalidate its claim to our allegiance.

There is a certain school of thought which wages war against human freedom in the interest of material laws and forces. Israel, on the contrary, waged war against it in the name and for the honour of the supernatural God. As an instinctive repugnance to use his own spiritual freedom led him to relegate God to a world beyond the confines of Nature, so, with a fearless logic which has been reproduced and re-emphasized by Calvinism, he deduced from the primary postulate of supernaturalism his own spiritual helplessness, conceiving of himself not as a living soul divinely inspired, but as passive clay in the potter's hand. If we grant Israel's premises, we must accept his conclusions ; but the cogency of his logic must not blind us to the fundamental immorality of his theory of life. Christ, who saw in Pharisaism the last term in the practical exposition of that theory, went back to the fountain-head of Israel's philosophy in order to find out where he had gone astray. If the action of God is incompatible with the freedom of man, morality is obviously a delusion and right indistinguishable

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from wrong. Confronted by a web of sophistical reasoning, Christ rent it asunder and laid bare the baseness, or at least the weakness, of soul, out of which and by which it had been spun and woven. His own solution of the great problem is simplicity itself. God is at the heart of Nature, and is therefore the true self of man. It follows that the presence of the divine will is the very source of man's freedom. I am free when *I*—the true self—am the author and originator of my own action ; but I am not *I*—the true self—until "I and my Father are one." In other words, I am never so free as when I am constrained by the grace of God.

A profound philosophy underlies this far-reaching conception. If freedom implies the absence of external constraint, then it is certain that one thing, and one only, is absolutely free. That one thing is the totality of things, the living whole. Each detailed thing in Nature acts under the stress and pressure of the whole ; but the whole itself—Nature in the unity and totality of her being—is obviously free. Now we mean by Nature what is real in Nature ; we mean her true self ; we mean the positive

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pole of her being ; we mean the all-inclusive synthesis ; we mean the World-soul, or indwelling Spirit of God. God, the true self of Nature and the true self of man, is the only fountain of freedom ; and the more fully man realizes his destiny, the more completely he brings his individual will into harmony with the Universal Will, the more abundantly he "grows in grace," the greater is his spiritual freedom and the more thorough his mastery of circumstance and of fate. Conversely, the more sedulously he cultivates the divine gift of freedom, the more strenuously he exercises his initiative, not only in the sphere of conduct (in the narrower sense of the word), but also and more especially in the regions of high thinking and deep feeling, the nearer does he get to the ideal goal of his being, the goal of submission to the Divine Will and of oneness with the Divine Soul. Looked at from this point of view, the legal conception of morality is seen to be profoundly immoral. But the point of view is one which Israel was at all times unwilling to take and became at last incapable of taking. So far as I am trying to disprove his theory of things, I am arguing,

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as I know well, in a circle. I am assuming that soul-growth is the true destiny of man ; but the assumption is one which Israel cannot and will not concede. The plain truth is that legalism knows nothing about soul-growth and cares less. It takes for granted that man, at his highest and best, is a naughty child, who can only be saved from destruction by being alternately bribed and coerced into obedience to a divinely given law ; and it infers from this that obedience is the ideal end of his being, as well as the only path in which it is safe for him to walk. That it takes this view of man, that it ignores by anticipation the great idea of evolution—the idea which is slowly dawning, through clouds of materialistic prejudice, on the inner vision of man—is, as it seems to me (but here again I am begging the question), its gravest defect. The greatness of Christ as a thinker shows itself in nothing so clearly as in this, that, instinctively and in virtue of a spiritual “second sight,” he kept open his communications with the future, and sowed in the minds of men the seeds of ideas which would fructify, not wither, in the expanding light of human thought.

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The *seventh* and last service that Christ renders to morality—the last and the first, for it at once summarizes and explains all the rest—is to base it upon faith and to resolve it into love. For Christ, as for Israel, the life of man, as a moral agent, is to be based upon faith; but whereas Israel meant by faith trust in the formulated threats and promises of the supernatural God, Christ meant by it trust in Nature, trust in the order of things in which we find ourselves, trust—since God is at the heart of Nature, and since the real order of things is the expression of His will—trust in the power and wisdom and goodness of God. The actual faith of a man is his actual attitude towards the realities that environ him. It is because this attitude, not merely in man, but in all living things, is in the main one of trust that I have applied the word *faith* to it. But behind and beyond all actual faith is ideal faith, the ideal attitude of the soul towards the realities that environ it, the attitude which each soul in turn ought to adopt if it is to bear itself aright as it journeys through life. For Christ ideal faith is an attitude of implicit and unswerving trust, not of trust in this

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teacher or that, in this creed or that, in this institution or that, but simply of trust,—a feeling which exists and energizes before it becomes aware of its object, but which gradually realizes that it is directing itself towards the real order of things, towards an all-sustaining Power and an all-embracing Love. Christ has told us that if we had faith, in the true sense of the word, we could move mountains. This saying, like others that are ascribed to Christ, has been misinterpreted in the interest of supernaturalism. If Nature had not meant far more to Christ than to most men he would not have deified her, he would not have placed God at the heart of her. He knew, better than most men, how vast and varied are her resources. He realized, we may well believe, that there are planes of existence other and higher than that which we call physical, that there are latent forces and latent modes of being in Nature and latent powers and latent senses in man. This, I think, is the real connection between his miracles and his creed. His boundless trust in Nature had given him supernormal insight into her laws and possibilities, and in the strength of this insight he

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was able to wield supernormal powers, to control supernormal forces, to produce supernormal results. But this is by the way. What interests me in Christ's miracles is that they bear witness (if his own explanation of them may be accepted) to the strength of his faith—to the completeness of his trust in the resources of Nature and in the goodwill of God. He based his own life on this feeling, and he wished men to realize that, both actually and ideally, it is the only permanent basis of life.

Now the life that is based on faith must needs be regulated by one master-law, that of love. Implicit trust is, indeed, scarcely to be distinguished from love, being, in fact, the first stage, as love is the last (and the first), in the surrender of the soul to the attractive force of realities which announce themselves as worthy of our devotion. To meet the world, to meet life, to meet destiny, to meet the whirl and rush of events, to meet the frowns and smiles of Fortune with unwavering trust, is to take for granted that light, not darkness—the light of God's wisdom and goodness—is at the heart of Nature; and to believe in that light is to love it (for its attractive force—once it has been



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discerned, however dimly—is irresistible), and to love it is to love all things for its sake. In the Christ-like life there is, in the last resort, but one motive to action,—love. Sweeping aside as frivolous, inquisitorial, and impertinent, the ever-increasing multitude of rules which complicated the life and burdened the conscience of the zealous Jew, Christ gave us instead of these two cardinal commandments which are really one: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength,” and “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” In these words the doom of the old dispensation—the dispensation of salvation through mechanical obedience—is pronounced, and the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven—the Kingdom of freedom and love—are thrown open to all men.

But before man can be initiated into the new order of things, he must have settled his account with the old. The burden of legal obligation must be left behind, at the entrance to the Kingdom of Heaven, if the initiate is to breathe freely in the new atmosphere of faith

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and peace and joy. In other words, he must realize that his "sins have been forgiven him." With a splendid audacity, due to the inspiration of spiritual genius, Christ took upon himself to forgive sin. What did he mean by this? The Pharisees were scandalized by his conduct, and accused him of claiming equality with God; and this charge, brought against him in the first instance by his bitterest enemies, has been endorsed by his followers in all ages. But the charge is without foundation; and the fact that it is still made (though, of course, "orthodoxy" believes that it is glorifying Christ in making it) proves nothing except that the ideas of Judaism are still, unhappily, in the ascendant. We shall not even begin to understand what Christ meant by "forgiveness of sin" until we have accustomed ourselves to look at sin from his standpoint, from the standpoint of his hatred of Pharisaism. Sin cannot be forgiven (in the theological sense of the word) except on the assumption that the Pharisaical conception of sin as illegality, or rather as a breach of legal contract, is correct. In that case sin can be forgiven by him who has been sinned against; in other words (I speak as a Pharisee),

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by God. If one of two contracting parties, A (in this case, man), fails to fulfil his side of a bargain, the other party, B (in this case, God), may, if he pleases, forgive him his breach of contract. This means that B will fulfil his side of the bargain, just as if the contract had not been broken by A, just as if the sin had not been committed. In other words, he will wipe out the transgression, as one writes off a bad debt, he will cancel the sin, regard it as non-existent. Thus, from the Pharisaical point of view, sin could be forgiven, but by God alone. As the conception of sin as breach of contract was utterly repugnant to Christ, we may be quite sure that in taking upon himself to forgive sin, he neither meant to sanction the Pharisaical view of morality nor to claim equality with God. What he did mean was to tell us that sin, just so far as it is illegality, *and nothing more*, is not sin at all. He said to men who were groaning under the yoke of the Law: "These peccadilloes, these breaches of petty and meaningless regulations, which weigh so heavily on your conscience, are not sinful in any respect or degree, except so far as the commission of them has reacted injuriously on your

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soul. Whether it has done this or not is known to you and to no one else. If it has not done this, you are innocent of sin." Thus in proclaiming forgiveness of sin, Christ was really changing our conception of sin: he was abrogating the legal standard and sending men back to an inward and spiritual standard.

But, be it carefully observed, Christ saw quite clearly that, when judged by the inward and spiritual standard, sin is, or, at any rate, may be, unforgivable. In a remarkable passage, which has sorely puzzled the commentators, he tells men that there is a sin of which there is no forgiveness,—the sin against the Holy Spirit. By this he meant, as it seems to me, two things. He meant that of sin which is really sin, sin which is the outcome of a corrupt heart and fraught with injury to the soul—the dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit—there can be no forgiveness, either in the legal sense of the word or in his own anti-legal sense; he meant that moral iniquity is both too real to be cancelled and too serious to be ignored. No one, not even God, can come between sin of that sort and its natural consequences, the most momentous of which is the injury that it does

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to the soul of the sinner. The sin may be lived down and outgrown, but it can never be forgiven ; it can never be made as though it had not been.

This is one thing that Christ meant when he spoke of the unforgivable sin. But he also meant something deeper than this. He meant that, even if the idea of forgiving sin be entirely transformed, even if the standpoint of legality be finally abandoned, there remains a class of sins which neither merits nor seeks forgiveness. And, first of all, he meant, in transforming our conception of sin, to transform our conception of forgiveness of sin. He has told us more than once to forgive sins—sins that have been committed against us—even as God forgives us our sins. These passages make it clear what Christ meant by God forgiving sins, and how far he had travelled from the Pharisaical conception of God as a creditor who cancelled debts or as a contracting party who condoned breaches of contract. When a man forgives another man who has sinned against him, he does not blot the man's sin out of existence, he does not make it as though it had never been. No ; but he overlooks the sin and tries to forget it, and

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goes on loving the sinner in spite of it. And this is what God does to us. He loves us in spite of our sins, and will draw us to Himself in disregard of them, so long as we are capable of loving our fellow men and of showing our love by forgiving them their sins against us. If we retain our power of loving we shall be able to outgrow and live down our sins, we shall be able to prove that our sins were no sins, in that they did us no lasting moral harm.<sup>1</sup> We shall also be able, since love is the soul's response to love, to open our hearts to the sunshine of God's presence. The intimate, the vital connexion which exists in Christ's mind between God forgiving man his trespasses and man forgiving his fellow men, makes it clear what Christ finally meant by the sin of which there is no forgiveness. That sin is *hatred*, the sin of sins against man, the sin of sins against the Holy Spirit of God. For God is ever drawing us to Himself by the magnetic might of love; and the hatred which makes a man incapable of loving his brother and forgiving him his trespasses, makes him also incapable of

<sup>1</sup> Compare, "Her sins which are many are forgiven; for she loved much."—S. Luke vii. 47.

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yielding to the attractive force of God's love, and of receiving at His hands that boon of forgiveness which is but another name for the patience and the long-suffering of love.

It is worthy of note that in the apocryphal but beautiful and eminently characteristic story of the woman taken in adultery, Christ did not forgive the sinner. He said to her : "Neither do I condemn thee : go thy way ; from henceforth sin no more." The meaning of this is plain. Christ could not forgive the woman as he forgave those who had sinned against that ceremonial law which the Pharisees loved so well, for adultery is a sin against the soul. Nor could he forgive her in the deeper, diviner, more personal sense of the word, for she had not sinned against him. But he refused to condemn her. The truth is that in giving us an inward instead of an outward standard of moral worth, he withdrew from us in large measure the right to constitute ourselves judges of our neighbour's conduct. Vexatious inquisitorial interference with one's neighbour's life and conduct is of the very essence of Pharisaism. But Christ, who saw that both the real motives and the real consequences of moral action are inward and

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spiritual, and therefore known only to the actor, or, at any rate, known far more fully to him than to any one else, said to us, "Judge not, that ye be not judged." We are to forgive those, and those only, who have sinned against *us*. Others we are not to presume even to judge.

Free from the burden of sin (in the legal sense of the word) man is invited to enter the Kingdom. If he responds to that invitation he will have, henceforth, to breathe the air of freedom ; and in that stimulating air he will have to put away childish things, he will have to rise to the level of his spiritual manhood, he will have to work out his own salvation by exercising freely and fearlessly all the spiritual gifts—imaginative, intellectual, artistic, emotional, moral—with which Nature has endowed him. In other words, instead of being content to be borne along by external forces and controlled by external influences, he must himself direct and carry on the process of his spiritual development, he must take his higher life into his own hands.

With this prospect before him, what response will he make to Christ's call ?



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## CHAPTER VI—Apparent Failure

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**W**HEN I was a child I was taught that Christ bore the burden of our sins for us, and that every sin that I had committed, or was destined to commit, added something to the anguish that he endured when he hung for our sakes on the cross. Those who taught me this were under the influence of that legal conception of life from which Christ laboured unceasingly to deliver us. The burden of man's sin had always pressed lightly upon Christ, and I cannot think that it pressed heavily upon him when the approach of death was giving supernormal clearness to his inward vision. If he had never before understood what he of all men understood best, the place that "sin" holds in the cosmic scheme of things, he understood it then. No; if there was any spiritual burden that he had to bear during those hours of physical anguish, it was the burden, not of the sins of others, but of his own apparent failure. Those who were nearest and dearest to him had failed

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to assimilate his revolutionary ideas. What hope was there that his teaching would make headway among "the nations," in whose minds the seeds of it were destined to be sown? It was to the Græco-Roman world that his message was about to be delivered. From his own nation he had nothing to hope. He had renounced and denounced its most cherished ideas, and he must have known that it would reject his. But would that wider world in which Judæa was a province and the Jews a sect, be able to receive and interpret his teaching? It is possible that Christ knew enough about that world to feel sure that it would not. It is more probable that he was content to make his personal experience the basis of his expectations and his hopes. He knew that he was capable of inspiring personal devotion; and he had seen, in the case of his own disciples, that personal devotion to a great teacher does not necessarily give insight into the Master's mind. If he allowed himself to look into the future he may have foreseen that his disciples, in the ardour of their devotion to his person, would transmit his influence in ever-widening circles through the Græco-Roman

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world. But if he foresaw this he must also have foreseen that, with their enthusiastic love of their Master, they would transmit to "the nations" their inability to interpret his thought.

These are idle speculations ; but for us who can look back to the days to which Christ may have looked forward, it is easy to see that the early fructification of his dominant ideas was in the nature of things impossible. Had those ideas won immediate acceptance, their premature success would have been their final condemnation. Great ideas have to pass through long periods of germination, and therefore of apparent sterility ; and that Christ's ideas are now, after nineteen centuries, waiting for their prophets and their interpreters proves nothing except that they are grandly revolutionary, and that, when they do win acceptance, their influence will be far-reaching and the scale of their activity large. But, apart from these general considerations, there were special reasons why Christ's message to man should fall at first on deaf or unwilling ears. The Græco-Roman world in which Christ lived and worked, and which was destined to be the medium for

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transmitting his influence to mankind, had fallen into a state of spiritual decadence. Its three leading peoples—the Greek, the Roman, and the Jewish—had all outlived their spiritual prime. Their outbursts of expansive energy were over. Their literatures had receded some distance from the high-water mark of inspired poetry, and were still steadily ebbing. Unable and unwilling to make fresh spiritual growth, they desired to be “saved,” as the spiritually decadent have ever done and will ever do, by machinery, by a *régime* of unintelligent obedience, by a life of soulless routine. Their own religions were dying. If a new religion was to be given to them, it must come to them as a system, as a law, as a formulated creed. When the religion for which they had been waiting did come to them, they made it what they wished it to be. That its nominal founder was the sworn enemy of machinery, of routine, of blind obedience, of everything that they held most dear, mattered nothing. Devotion to his person was at first and for many generations a living force which more than counterbalanced the spiritual indolence of their decadent souls. But as that force began

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to expend itself, as its outflow of volcanic energy began to cool down and harden, the devotion of the Christian to Christ became the very pivot and centre of the formal system which was gradually elaborating itself in response to the secret demands of his spiritual weakness and his lack of living faith.

It is easy to trace the steps by which the change from faith in Christ to belief about Christ was effected. So long as personal devotion was the life and soul of Christianity, the desire to be drugged with dogmatic teaching remained, for the most part, in abeyance. But, weakened by the lapse of time and unsustained by intellectual sympathy with the Master's soul, the magnetic influence of Christ's personality slowly lost its power; and as it declined, the mental lassitude of the decadent world that centred in Rome began to assert itself, and the demand for those mental narcotics which theology provides so liberally—creeds, codes, systems, and the like—began to make itself felt. As Christianity had come to the Græco-Roman world from a Jewish source, and through a Jewish medium, it was but natural

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that Christendom should turn to the Jewish Scriptures for instruction and guidance. The fact that Christ had quoted those Scriptures and appealed to them seemed to invest them with supreme authority. It was of course inevitable that Christ's attitude towards the Old Testament should be misunderstood by men who were constitutionally incapable of placing themselves at his spiritual standpoint. In point of fact, there are at least four obvious reasons why Christ, whose environment was almost wholly Jewish, should have appealed to the Jewish Scriptures, both when he taught his disciples and when he denounced and controverted his opponents. In the first place, he was in entire agreement with the fundamental idea of the Old Testament, the idea of subordinating the individual to the Universal Will. In the second place, he was in deep sympathy with the poets and prophets of the Old Testament, of whom indeed he was himself the greatest and the last. In the third place, he naturally wished to meet his opponents on ground of their own choosing. In the fourth place, he wished to make men realize how far the national life had receded from what was

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highest and best in its own ideal. These reasons make the "orthodox" hypothesis, that Christ accepted the theology of the Old Testament, wholly superfluous. But the decadent mind, the mind that has fallen below the level of poetic life, always prefers the letter to the spirit of what is said or written. Christ had appealed to the Jewish Scriptures. Whatever might be the reasons for his having done so, the fact that he did so remained. And this literal fact, dissociated from and unexplained by reference to the general tenour of Christ's teaching, is the flimsy foundation on which the whole structure of Christian theology has been reared. The Western mind accepted and still accepts Judaism, chiefly (as it professes, and no doubt sincerely believes) for Christ's sake. Strange irony of fate! Literalists that we are, because Christ expressed his ideas in the notation of Judaism, we think that he gave his sanction to the whole Judaic scheme of thought. We accept the notation that Christ used, and we reject the ideas (all intensely anti-Judaic) that he used it to express.

But the real reason for the acceptance of Judaism by the Græco-Roman world lies deeper

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than the plummet of theological thought can sound. Men found, as it happened, in the Jewish Scriptures the very thing which they were in search of,—a cut-and-dried “theory of things,” a definite and coherent account of God’s ways and works. Elaborated as it had been by minds which preferred machinery to life, this theory of things was readily assimilated by a world in which mental decadence—with its concomitant loss of energy and initiative—had been generated by the widespread decay of national life. Not indeed that the Jewish system of thought was accepted in its entirety. To do so would have made Christ’s mission meaningless, would have stultified his antagonism to legalism, and would have imposed upon the Western world the heavy burden of obedience to the Jewish law. Israel’s “theory of things” and Israel’s way of looking at things—his dualism, his dogmatism, even the materialism of his Messianic hope—were unreservedly accepted; but the Law, with the exception of the Ten Commandments, was informally rejected. In other words, the Græco-Roman world adopted Israel’s philosophy, but turned away from his rigid and



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oppressive scheme of life. The change of direction which was thus given to the Judaizing tendencies of Christian thought had momentous consequences. Forbidden by circumstances to drink of the waters of legalism (in the strict sense of the word), the desire to obey and to earn salvation by obedience must needs slake itself at some other spring. And while it was seeking what it needed, the sister desire—the desire for “theological information,” the desire for definite instruction “sur les objets même où toute précision est erreur”—was gradually constructing an un-failing reservoir of “authority” from which both desires might drink as often and as deeply as they pleased.

To conciliate devotion to the spirit of the Old Testament with devotion to the person of Christ was the problem which the thinkers of Christendom found themselves called upon to solve. Their solution of it was, as might have been expected, in keeping with that general attitude—mental and spiritual—which had sent them, in their search for a philosophy, to Israel instead of to Christ. The verbal ingenuity of the degenerate Greek intellect,

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working on materials furnished by Judaism, found a place in the Old Testament scheme of things for the personality of the adored Christ and for the drama of his life and death. That Christ should be identified with the Messiah by men who at once revered him as their Lord and Master, and accepted the ideas of Judaism, was indeed inevitable ; and that, having been identified with the Messiah, he should be invested with divine rank, was scarcely less certain, for in the feverish phases of the Messianic dream there were moments when the Messiah was conceived of as something higher than a divinely appointed commissioner, as the very incarnation of the eternal God. With the deification of Christ a new fountain of authoritative teaching was unsealed. The penalty that one pays for deifying a great teacher is to dwell with superstitious reverence on the mere letter of his teaching. But the penalty was one which Christendom gladly paid when it deified Christ. As the Jew banished God to a world beyond Nature in order that from that region—beyond the limits of knowledge, and therefore of criticism—an authoritative message might come

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to him, telling him what to believe and to do, so the Christian made his Lord and Master ascend to the same supernatural Heaven in order that all his recorded sayings might become weighty and conclusive as the words of God Himself. If Christ was divine (in the supernatural sense of the word) every word that he spoke must have been divinely true. That being so, the task of interpreting the spirit of his teaching, a task for which the Græco-Roman mind was wholly unfit, had become superfluous. The letter was sufficient for man's needs. Each sentence that Christ had uttered was a storehouse of "theological information," the key to which was in the keeping, not of spiritual insight and sympathy, but of logical acumen. And so, out of the words (genuine or spurious), as distinguished from the thoughts of Christ, was built by Greek sophistry, on the basis of Jewish philosophy, what the Græco-Roman world was in secret need of,—a creed, an authoritative statement of what man was to believe about God.

By whom was this creed constructed? By whom was it to be guarded, interpreted, and (if the need should arise) still further elaborated?

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Above all, by whom was the believer to be taught, now that the Law had been abrogated, what he was to *do*? The Roman genius for organization gave a practical answer to these questions. Though the Law had been abrogated, the desire to be "saved" by obedience remained. The counterpart of obedience is authority. A written Law, interpreted by the labours of scribes, might suffice for the needs of Israel, though even within the narrow limits of the Jewish world the lack of a central authority had been sorely felt. But in the vast and complicated Græco-Roman world, authority, if it was to be effective, must be thoroughly organized. The Roman capacity for government, matured and developed by centuries of experience, had carried the organization of secular authority to a high degree of perfection. It was inevitable that Christianity should make Rome its headquarters; and it was inevitable that, when it had done so, it should give to Christendom the organization which it needed, and which alone could save it from anarchy, and so make it possible for the faithful to enter, without misgiving, the path of obedience and routine. So strong was the *genius loci*

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that, when Rome became the headquarters of Christianity, a well-spring of spiritual authority, abundant and unfailing, gushed forth spontaneously (one might almost say) on Roman soil.

To trace the growth of the Christian Church is beside my purpose and beyond my power. What it concerns us to notice is that, by the time the Church had been fully organized, the whole diameter of thought separated Christianity from the mind of Christ. Everything that Christ valued most, with the exception of such sentiments and rules of life as devotion to his person had forced upon the conscience of Christendom, had either been ignored or proscribed. Everything that Christ hated most had been accepted, systematized, and authoritatively taught. All the ideas of the Old Testament, the ideas that had led men to Pharisaism, had been formally adopted. The central idea of Israel's creed, that of salvation by machinery, had won a complete and apparently final triumph over the central idea of Christ's creed, that of salvation by spiritual growth. The false dualism of the Old Testament—its total separation of the supernatural from Nature, of Heaven from

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earth, of God from man—had become the basis of the philosophy of Christendom. The fundamental postulate of dogmatism—that it is possible to know about God as one knows about material things, and that therefore knowledge of God can be received in the form of a series of propositions, instead of being secretly assimilated, as light and life, by the growing and expanding soul,—this fatal postulate, with all that it implied, had become the very cornerstone of the edifice of the Church. The externalism, the ceremonialism, the literalism, the materialism, the pessimism, the false asceticism, the exclusiveness, the uncharitableness of the Jews had entered into the life-blood of Christianity. The audacious claim of Israel to be God's chosen people had been matched and even out-rivalled by the claim of the Church to have inherited a complete monopoly of the grace and favour of God. The Messianic idea, an idea which polluted the eschatology of the Church at its very fountain-head, had been welcomed with enthusiasm and applied to the person of Christ. The doctrine of the Incarnation—a doctrine which, rightly interpreted, is in itself the antidote to all the poison of

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Judaism—had been Judaized, set forth in the notation of the supernatural, brought into line with the stories of the Creation and the Fall. Except so far as the personal influence of Christ—the Christ of Gospel story—liberated men from and lifted them above the formal conceptions of their creed, the relapse into Judaism was complete. The war that Judaism had waged against freedom—the inward freedom which is the counterpart of spiritual life—had been renewed by Christianity, and was being carried on with deeper skill, with ampler resources, and on an immeasurably larger scale. If in the sphere of conduct the yoke of the Church was less heavy than the yoke of the Law, in the sphere of belief it was incomparably heavier. Indeed, it is because the Church has always cared more for belief than for conduct, that it has been, and still is, the most implacable enemy of freedom that the world has ever known. To tell men that they are to believe such and such things about God and Nature and Man, that these things are “the Truth,” that to question them is to run the risk of spiritual death; to feed the soul with rations of “doctrine” which it cannot assimilate, and which it

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is not even asked to digest, and to forbid to it all other spiritual food ;—is to starve all those vital faculties and energies—the higher reason, the higher imagination, prophetic insight, poetic emotion—by which, and through which, the spiritual development of mankind is carried on. It is this, and it is more than this. It is to undermine the faith of the soul in its higher self, and therefore in the indwelling spirit of God : it is to deny it personal access to the one unfailing fountain of life and light. Of the sacramental system of the Church—that elaborate machinery for monopolizing and exploiting the Divine Grace—I need not speak at length. That the Church, as a living organism, should have chosen that way of interposing itself between the soul and God, was as inevitable as that the Law, being a written code, should have taken the path of Pharisaical intolerance in its attempt to reach the same goal.

If the message of Christ to mankind was a message of spiritual life, the progress of Christendom under the guidance of the Church must have been in the direction of spiritual death. It is true that Christianity has, from the beginning of things, had one good angel,



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by whose beneficent influence it has again and again been saved from itself,—the incomparable personality of Christ. But personal influence, however potent it may be, cannot operate effectively except through a sympathetic medium; and as the creed of the Church became more and more antagonistic to the creed of Christ, the response of Christendom to the magnetic charm of the Gospel story became proportionately weaker. Great as was the advantage that the early Christian Church possessed in its comparative nearness to the life of Christ on earth, there is reason to believe that, as the religion of the Græco-Roman world, Christianity would have died of its own inherent corruption—so radically false was its philosophy—had not a fortunate accident<sup>1</sup> enabled it at once to enlarge its borders and to renew its youth. That accident was the overthrow of the Roman Empire by the semi-barbarous races from the North and East. In Asia and Africa, where there was no strong influx of young-hearted conquerors, Christianity, though it had produced a noble army of saints and martyrs, died

<sup>1</sup> I am, of course, using the word *accident* in its primary, not in its secondary sense.

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them "the Truth" (though both she and they fondly imagined that she did) mattered little. What she did for them was to transmit to them, through a medium which their own childlike faith had helped to clarify, the life-giving influence of Christ's gracious personality; and the natural, trustful obedience which they willingly gave to him and to her (for his sake) was an infinitely better and healthier thing—healthier as a symptom, and healthier in its reaction on the character of the giver—than the artificial obedience of worldly and decadent souls.<sup>1</sup>

But men cannot remain children for ever. As the stress of Nature's expansive forces carries them from childhood towards adolescence, the time comes when childlike obedience ceases to be possible, and the choice has

<sup>1</sup> What the Teutonic races did to the Latin Church the Slavonic did to the Greek. But the life of the Greek Church, when she evangelized the Slavonic world, had become far more mechanical and unspiritual than that of the Latin Church when the Teutonic races came under her sway. Also, and partly as a result of this, the awakening of the Slavonic mind came far later than that of the Teutonic. Indeed, it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that the struggle of the Slavonic races for freedom—spiritual as well as political—has only just begun.

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to be made between machinery and life. Six centuries ago, more or less, the Western world began to chafe against its bonds, and a struggle began,—a struggle on the part of the growing soul of Western Christendom to free itself from the despotism of the Church and (after the Reformation) of the other exponents of dogmatism. That struggle is still in progress, and the end of it is probably far distant. For many centuries free-thinking—and what is thought if it be not free?—was prohibited by the Church except within narrow limits prescribed by herself. The expanding Teutonic consciousness fought for freedom on all the planes of thought, and won it on the physical plane. For this there were two reasons: the errors of Church-teaching were more easily exposed on the physical plane than elsewhere; and the right to lay down the law about physical phenomena was, for obvious reasons, less valued by the Church than the right to dictate to men about spiritual things. On the other planes the victory won for freedom was, on the whole, more nominal than real. The right to profess unorthodox beliefs, without being burned for them, was indeed won by Protestantism after

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two centuries of bloody strife. But though Protestantism repudiated the authority of Rome and much of her formal teaching, it found it needful to meet the dogmatism of the Roman Church with a counter-dogmatism of its own. It is not to be blamed for this. Men were not yet ripe for spiritual freedom : the iron of Judaism had gone too deep into their souls. That freedom has not yet triumphed on the higher planes of thought is proved by the fact that even in this age, which regards itself with good reason as exceptionally emancipated and enlightened, free-thinking on the planes of moral conduct and religious belief is strongly discountenanced by public opinion ; the word *free-thinker* being used by the man of average piety and respectability as equivalent to *anarchist* (on the ethical plane) or to *atheist* (on the spiritual).

The consequences of this virtual proscription of "high-thinking" have been disastrous. Debarred—*de facto* if not *de jure*—from energizing on the higher planes of thought, the Western mind has energized on the physical plane with extraordinary skill and success. One result of this is that it has got to regard the physical

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plane, first as the only plane worth exploring, and then as the only plane really existing. In other words, it has begun to lose its way in the "Serbonian Bog" of materialism. "Orthodoxy" deplors this tendency, for which, however, it is itself in large measure responsible. High-thinking has so long been denounced as impiety that the corresponding organ or organs of the human spirit have become atrophied by disuse. Moreover, the general tendency of all these centuries of dogmatic teaching has been to give a materialistic bias to human thought. The belief, deeply ingrained in the Western mind, and operative even when it is formally repudiated, that the material aspect of Nature is the only aspect, is the exact analogue and perhaps also the lineal descendant of the Jewish belief—inherited and ratified by Christianity—that Nature is godless, soulless, a "body of death." To regard Nature as divorced from God is to disbelieve in the reality, the *natural* reality, of what is spiritual. So complete is the confusion between the supernatural and the spiritual that, in ceasing to believe in the former, the thinkers of Europe and America are becoming sceptical as to the very existence

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of the latter. It is not only the bewildered priest who cries out that the criticism which discredits the story of the "Virgin Birth" is "robbing him of his God." The enlightened materialist says the same thing in other words. The estrangement, in religious thought, of God from Nature is indeed so thorough and far-reaching, and has gone on for so long, that the power of seeing God *in* Nature has been largely if not wholly lost. But the loss of this power, though it may send men to the churches and sects for consolation and guidance, and so come to be regarded as the vestibule of faith, is in reality worthier of the name of atheism than any merely formal denial of the existence of God. The man who cannot believe in God—cannot believe that light and love are at the heart of the universe—unless he may also believe in the virgin birth and bodily resurrection of Christ; the man who cannot discern God's presence for himself, and is therefore dependent on dogmatic teaching for his belief in God's existence;—is an atheist in the inner recesses of his soul, even though he be the devoutest of saints.

In this way, and to this extent, Christianity

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has estranged Christian thought from Christ. But there is always a practical side to human thought, and it is in the sphere of practical life that the estrangement is most pronounced. Christendom shows its disloyalty to Christ in nothing so much as in the materialization of its ideals, aims, and pursuits. For Christ the drama of the soul's evolution is the real movement of Nature. All other movements are subordinate to this, and have their meaning by reference to it. The migration of races ; the struggles between nations ; the rise and fall of empires ; the development of various types of civilization ; the pursuit of political and social, of ethical and religious ideals ; the quest of wealth, of position, of influence, of fame ; the exploits of warriors and rulers ; the enterprises of adventurous men ; the labours of students and investigators ; the achievements of poets and artists ; the toils and trials of daily life ; "the trivial round, the common task ;"—these things, which seem to the superficial observer to constitute the whole panorama of man's existence, are in reality mere by-products of his creative energy, mere accessories of his life.

For Christendom the drama of soul-life is of

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very small importance. By most men it is wholly ignored. With our eyes riveted on the ever-changing by-play, we are blind to what is really being enacted,—the evolution of the spirit of man. Or, if we do catch a fleeting glimpse of that world-wide movement, we do our best to forget what we have seen. Indeed, it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that we Christians value our religion chiefly because it enables us to forget that the inward drama is the main business of life. The mystery of the soul's destiny is imperious in the demands that it makes upon us, however intermittent these may be. The average man says to Religion, "Solve this mystery for me (charging me a reasonable price for your services), and leave me free to give my whole mind to secular pursuits." In our own day the materialization of human life—both national and individual—seems to be making rapid progress. The national ideal is to open up, by war or diplomacy, new markets for trade. The ideal of the average man is to make money, and to enjoy all the pleasures that money can buy. To explore the physical secrets of Nature, to extend man's mastery over her material forces, to develop the natural



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resources of the earth, is for the moment the highest and most disinterested of human aims.

That all this should come to pass was inevitable. The exclusion of the Western mind from the higher planes of thought caused it, as we have seen, when once it had won complete freedom on the physical plane, to devote itself to the exploration of that plane with great energy and with ever-increasing skill and success. But Physical Science has a practical side to it. Each new discovery prepares the way for new inventions and new industries. The more we know about the physical world the more use we are able to make of it. Industrialism and commercialism march in the wake of science, and exploit the lands which scientific research has discovered and won. In an age like ours, in which discovery follows discovery with startling rapidity, industrialism and commercialism make feverish progress, and, as a necessary consequence of this, the power of money and the value which public opinion attaches to money become enormously enhanced.

There is another point of view from which the descent of the human spirit into practical

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materialism is seen to be due, in part at least, to Christianity having lost touch with the mind of Christ. Christianity, as a religion which claimed universal dominion, carried on the work which Republican and Imperial Rome had more than half completed,—the work of delivering men from communal pressure, from the rigid and exacting despotism (at once religious, ethical, and social) of the family, the clan, and the city. Nay, there were occasions when, as the cult of the one and only God, Christianity claimed the right to absolve men from allegiance to the State as such. It thus helped to prepare the way for the *régime* of social individualism, the *régime* under which—with the derivative *régime* of competitive industrialism—we are at present living. Now there is a serious and obvious danger that, if men are given social freedom before they are ripe for spiritual freedom, their innate selfishness—unrestrained by communal pressure and untransfigured by spiritual growth—will tend to “make human life a hell.” And so the religion which has on the one hand fostered social individualism, and on the other hand done all that lay in its power to suppress spiritual freedom, and therefore to arrest

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spiritual growth, must be held to have betrayed its trust. The horrors and miseries of competitive industrialism are the products of many causes. One of these, and not the least potent, is that man's ambition, like his imaginative reason, though thwarted by official Christianity in all its spiritual enterprises, has been left free, and has even been indirectly encouraged, to pursue material ends.

There is yet another reason for the progressive materialization of the ideals of Christendom. The belief that the material aspect of Nature is the only aspect has its counterpart in the belief that the earthly life of the soul is the only life. This belief, though formally discountenanced by Christianity, flourishes with extraordinary vigour in the soil of Christian thought. For in this, as in other matters, Christianity has followed the lead of Israel rather than of Christ. The reticence of Christ with regard to the destiny of the soul after death is remarkable, and is doubtless due to his having despaired of communicating to minds obsessed with the materialism of the Messianic dream his own faith in the reality and eternity of the soul. But the argument

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which he used to confute the enlightened and sceptical Sadducees, who had come to believe that death is the end of life, shows how very far he was from accepting the current belief in the resurrection of the dead. God is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob ; and He is the God of the living, not of the dead. Therefore Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are living, and have never really died. In other words, death is an illusion. That which is near and dear to God—the soul, the true self—shares in the eternity of the divine source of its life.

“ All that is, at all,  
Lasts ever past recall ;  
Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure :  
What entered into thee,  
*That was, is, and shall be :*”

For Christ, then, immortality comes in the order—the real order—of Nature. The soul goes on living in virtue of its own inherent momentum, in virtue of its having come from God, who draws back to Himself by the divine might of love what He sends forth from Himself by the divine energy of will.

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Christianity, on the other hand, borrowed from Judaism its unhappy Messianic belief in the resurrection of the body,—a belief which at once materializes and de-naturalizes (for the raising of the dead body is obviously a miracle) the idea of immortality. The general tendency of Christian teaching has been to foster the belief that men are immortal, not by grace of Nature, but by grace of the supernatural, the miracle-working God. What wonder, then, that men who are beginning to disbelieve in miracles should turn away from the hypothesis of survival as from something which is not merely unproved and unprovable, but also incredible on *à priori* grounds? Then, again, the deplorable eschatology of Christendom ;—its cruel and irrational assumption that a single brief earth-life can determine for all eternity the destiny of the departed spirit ; its fundamental ignorance of Nature's paramount law, —that of spiritual evolution ; the fatal dualism (inherited from Israel) which makes it offer us our choice in the after-life between a quasi-material Hell and a quasi-material Heaven, between immeasurable misery and immeasurable *ennui* ;—all this has tended to make men

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dismiss the idea of immortality from their minds as unworthy of serious attention, and has confirmed them in the belief which the materialistic bias of their thought had already engendered, that beyond the grave there is nothing for man—

“Only the sleep eternal  
In an eternal night.”

In conclusion. When one compares the world as it now presents itself to human thought with the world as it has revealed itself, again and again, in the vision of the Poet or the dream of the Sage, one cannot but feel that an immense shrinkage has taken place in man's conception of reality, a shrinkage<sup>1</sup> which has narrowed the Universe—the totality of things—down to a single aspect of its being, to a single plane of existence, and by a parallel process contracted the eternity of the soul to the petty duration of a single earth-life; which has given us, as the limit of man's mental effort, the freezing negations of materialism

<sup>1</sup> On the physical plane the expansion in the range of man's mental vision has been immense. But this gain is far more than outweighed by the growing tendency to regard the physical plane as the only plane.

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instead of the "flaming walls" of imaginative thought, and, as the limit of man's moral effort, the sordid ends and aims of commercialism instead of the ideal of spiritual perfection which discloses itself to the aspiring soul. And this shrinkage in man's conception of reality is largely due to his having accepted as divinely inspired the narrow, rigid, unimaginative philosophy of Israel, and in particular to his having, in all seriousness, identified the God of Israel with the God of the Universe.<sup>1</sup>

It is to this pass that Christianity—the Christianity of the theologians—has brought Christendom.

<sup>1</sup> The cramping effect on the human mind of the Judaic assumptions of Christian "orthodoxy"—the assumption that the God of Israel is the God of the Universe, that the Bible is *the* "Word of God," that Christ is "the only-begotten Son of God," that this life on earth is the only temporal life, and so forth—is difficult for us to estimate, for the reason that we are still, unhappily, under its baneful influence. The injury done to the imaginative thought of the West by Christendom's meek acceptance of those anti-Christian conceptions makes itself felt on every plane of man's mental activity, and tends to narrow the outlook of even the most enlightened and most emancipated of minds. Nay, the very sceptic, who repudiates with scorn the teaching of official Christianity, suffers both in the quality of his scepticism and in the scope of his counter-faith from the secret pressure of the soul-constricting doctrines which he has consciously disowned.

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I know of nothing in history more tragic or more pathetic than the betrayal of Christ—the open renunciation of all the “sovereign dogmas” of his creed—by Christendom as such, and more especially by those earnest and devout Christians who profess to regulate their lives by his precepts, and are ready to die for his cause. But what deepens the gloom of the tragedy and intensifies its pathos is that the central figure in the supernatural drama which Judaism and Christian “orthodoxy” have combined to construct, and by using which as the fulcrum of its spiritual influence Christianity has undermined the philosophy of Christ, stultified his teaching, and re-imposed upon the human mind the very conceptions from which Christ had lived and died to deliver it,—is the figure of Christ himself.



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## CHAPTER VII—Final Triumph

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**I**T is possible, I think, that Christ, as he hung upon the cross, looked far into the future and saw that all these things would happen; saw that the soul-redeeming ideas which he had championed would be trampled underfoot by his professed disciples; saw that the soul-destroying system of thought from which he had striven to emancipate our minds would be re-established among men, re-established on a wider and firmer basis, and as a sterner and more stringent despotism—*in his name*. It is possible, I think, that some such flash of terrible prescience troubled for a moment the serenity of his inmost soul, and wrung from him in his anguish the mysterious cry, “My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?” But insight is the only source of foresight; and if Christ’s insight enabled him to see so far into the future as to forecast the abandonment and proscription of his creed by those who hailed him as their Lord and Master, it enabled him, I feel sure, to see further than

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this,—to see, beyond the gloom of apparent failure, the dawning light of final triumph. He had always believed in his own ideas, not merely with the faith of the enthusiastic devotee, but also with an imperturbable serenity of conviction which far transcended the utmost limits of enthusiastic devotion. If on the cross that marvellous faith faltered for an instant, we may be sure that it speedily regained its serenity, and with its serenity its unconquerable force.

Let that be as it may. One thing at least is clear, that if Christ did see light in the distant future, it was no mirage of a dying brain that met his gaze, but the glow of a great dawn. The glow of that dawn is beginning to be visible now. We who are able to pass in review the centuries that have come and gone since Christ died, can see that things are working for the emergence of his ideas, and for their eventual triumph. We have seen that Christianity had two good angels in the past,—the magnetic personality of Christ and the mental and spiritual youthfulness of the Teutonic and Slavonic races. These good angels still watch over it, and it may safely be predicted that they will continue to protect it, in

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the sense of saving it from itself, and that in the end they will transform it into the genuine creed of Christ. The Teutonic and Slavonic struggle for freedom—a struggle which is a vital aspect of the soul's spontaneous effort to grow, and as such is characteristic of the adolescence of every vigorous race—will be waged on higher planes of thought than the physical, and will at last be crowned by the acquisition of that spiritual freedom which Christ set before men as an ideal; and while this movement is taking place, the ideas which Christ advocated will emerge from the seed and the soil in which they have long lain hidden,—from the personal influence of the historic Christ.

Owing to free-thought having been proscribed on every plane but the physical, the Western mind—in its progressive search for freedom—will have to work its way from the physical plane upwards. That circumstances are now favourable for the initiation of such an upward movement can scarcely be doubted. The present generation may seem to be sunk deep in materialism; but there are indications that the Western mind is beginning, if not to wake from

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its slumber, at least to become aware that it is moving in a dream. The very trend of its more recent scientific discoveries is to emancipate it from the assumption which has long fettered its higher energies, the assumption that things are in themselves what they seem to be to our bodily senses.<sup>1</sup> The solidity, the concrete reality, the self-sufficiency of the outward world are beginning, as Science contemplates them with her steady and penetrative gaze, to pass slowly away. That crude atomism, which has long been the key to the fortress of materialistic thought, is already an exploded theory. Matter itself is melting before our eyes into mysterious and impalpable forces, which seem to be scarcely more substantial

<sup>1</sup> An entirely baseless assumption. "Our sensory perception" (as Science herself reminds us) "is limited to five modes, or channels, each of these embracing only a small part of an infinite scale of vibrating motions." It is to the widespread belief in the fundamental reality of *physical* matter, and of it alone, that the name *materialism* properly belongs. The higher materialism which, while admitting that matter may exist in forms immeasurably subtler than that which we call physical, contends that spirit and matter are the face and obverse of the same reality, has much to say for itself, and may well develop, under the stress of its own inherent momentum, into a sane idealism, far removed from the false dualism and the equally false monism of popular thought.

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in their texture than our own feelings and thoughts. By degrees, as we begin to realize that perceptibility by the bodily senses is not of the essence of matter, the idea that the physical plane of existence is not the only plane, and that there may perhaps be other and higher planes of quasi-objective being, will begin to dawn upon our minds. With the advent of this luminous idea, a gradual but potentially infinite expansion will take place in our conception of the inner life of man. For as it is conceivable that in the quasi-objective world there is plane behind and within and beyond plane, so it is conceivable that in the inner life there is self behind and within and beyond self, and that, though these hidden selves are at present submerged in the darkness of the "buried life," the evolution of the human spirit will gradually call them forth into the light of conscious activity and conscious thought. When this conception has become familiar to the human mind, the ideas that are implicit in it will begin to make their presence felt. We shall begin to dream, not without reason and not without hope, of new powers in man, of new forces in Nature, of

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new perceptive faculties, of new developments of reason, of new orders of phenomena, of new sciences, of new ideals and new standards of truth. I can do no more than indicate the marvellous vista which Physical Science, as the reward of its loyalty to its own conception of truth, is being allowed to open up to imaginative thought. In the light of these dawning ideas, the rigid and gloomy philosophy which Christian orthodoxy inherited from Judaism will become so utterly discredited that there will be no need for it to be formally disproved. The Western mind, forgetting that it was once in bondage to those barren dogmas, will turn away from them, not with disgust or contempt, but with the serenity of complete indifference, and pursue its upward way. For there is one lesson which its scientific researches on the physical plane will have taught it, and which it will carry with it as it ascends to higher and wider spheres of work. Its long training in a field in which verification of hypotheses is both possible and necessary will make it impatient of all dogmatism which has not a genuinely scientific basis, and will lead it, when it has to deal with matters which are

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at present beyond the reach of Science, to rely for inspiration and guidance on high imagination, on prophetic insight, on spiritual emotion, on the "common sense" of the soul, on all those faculties which find expression for themselves in *poetry*, rather than on a pseudo-science which mistakes words for realities, and esteems the dead logic of the syllogism above the living logic of spiritual growth.

When these emancipative influences have had time to do their work, the conditions will be favourable for the ideas that ruled Christ's mind to emerge from the obscurity to which the providence of Nature had consigned them, and to make a direct appeal to human thought. During the ages of mental expansion to which I have looked forward, the master idea of Christ's philosophy will be met and welcomed by the master idea of modern science. The idea of evolution, re-discovered and elaborated by Physical Science, will gradually ascend to higher planes of existence, and will at last be applied to the world to which it essentially belongs,—to the world of the soul's inner life. As the application of the idea becomes more

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and more spiritual, the mind of Christendom (if the West still bears that name) will come nearer and nearer to the mind of Christ ; for the idea of spiritual evolution, of soul-growth, was in very truth the paramount idea—at once supreme and central—of his esoteric creed. In this, as in other matters, Christ showed that he was a prophet, in the higher sense of that much-abused word. The prophet is one whose insight into things is so true and deep that it brings him near to their essential and eternal principles, with the result that he is able to keep open his communications with the remotest future, and that what he says—in his seasons of inspiration—is said for all time. In this sense of the word Christ was the greatest of all prophets ; and he showed his prophetic power in nothing so much as in this, that he not merely anticipated the great architectonic idea which the present generation regards as peculiarly its own, but went deeper into its essence than any modern thinker has yet attempted to do. For whereas modern thought, though familiar with the general idea of evolution, can form no conception of what is really being evolved, Christ saw



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that the evolution of the *soul* is the central movement of Nature, and constitutes the inmost meaning of existence, the drama of soul-life—and therefore of *soul-growth*—being for him (as I have already suggested) the only drama that is really being enacted on the stage of the Universe. Science, as it ascends from the physical world towards higher planes, will gradually spiritualize its view of evolution, and will at last convince itself that the final outcome of evolution is not “individualism,” or “communism,” or any other social by-product of the soul’s expansive energy, but the soul itself, the soul ripened and expanded till its conscious life has become divine. When Science has learned this truth, it will find itself face to face with the long-forgotten creed of Christ.

Great ideas, such as those which ruled Christ’s mind, are in the nature of things imperishable. Systems come and go. Theories change and pass. But a living idea is for ever. Proscribed in one epoch, forgotten in another, it lives on through æons of apparent sterility, till at last, in the “fulness of time,” the winter of its oblivion and neglect comes to an end, and its

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shoots push forth into the light of conscious thought. When the time comes for Christ's paramount ideas to assert themselves and win acceptance, men will ask in what secret hiding-place has their "buried life" been carried on through all the centuries that have passed since Christ died. To this question there will be two answers. The ideas for which Christ lived and died have lain hidden, first, in the personality of the historic Christ, and then, through the influence of that personality, in the hearts of men. Of the debt which Christendom owes to the personality of Christ—the Christ of Gospel story—I need not attempt to speak. Suffice it to say that from highest to lowest, from the most heroic to the most homely, all the good desires and good deeds of Christian men and women have been due (so far as their origin has been distinctively Christian) to the personal influence of the historic Christ,—in other words, to affection for and trust in the friend and guide and master whom the Gospel stories taught men, and still teach men, to know and love. It is true that in many cases this personal influence has been transmitted (to its own great detriment) through the medium

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of a theory or system of thought ; but though the theory or the system has been consciously accepted as "the Truth," it is not from it, but from the influences which it has been the means of transmitting, that the inspiration, the magnetic force has come. Now the personality of a man is always the embodiment of his ideas ; and it therefore follows that in holding intercourse, through the medium of love and trust, with Christ's personality, men have held intercourse, dimly and gropingly, with the ideas which that personality subconsciously expressed.

But the penalty that Christendom has paid for ignoring Christ's ideas in the region of conscious thought is that its intercourse with his personality has been unduly one-sided, and therefore far less illuminating and far less health-giving than it might otherwise have been. The speculative, imaginative side of a man is a part, and in some respects the highest part, of the man's inner being ; and it is at best but a maimed, truncated personality to which one has access so long as the ideas of the man can neither attract one's sympathy nor influence one's thought. Now to hold one-sided intercourse with Christ, whatever form that

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intercourse may take, is to miss what is most vital and essential in his character ; for the most distinctive feature of his personality is its many-sidedness, its having no one feature which dwarfed or overshadowed the rest. The writers of the Gospels failed, as we have seen, to do justice to Christ's ideas, with which, indeed, they had no sympathy ; but, in spite of themselves, they have done some measure of justice to his character. For the sayings and incidents which they have recorded, and allowed to tell their own story, leave on us the impression of a man of extraordinary range and flexibility of character ; of one who combined the naturalness and all-embracing sympathy of a Whitman with the high-souled purity of a Fra Angelico, — the radiant, love-begotten joyfulness of a Francis with the intense inwardness of a Hindoo saint ; of one in whom the balance between sympathy and aspiration was more perfectly maintained than in any other man whom history has made known to us. The ἐπιείκεια, or "sweet reasonableness" of Christ, to which one of the most gifted of modern critics has called our attention, pervaded all the strata of his being, and is in a sense the secret of his many-sidedness, for

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it enabled each of the noble qualities of his nature to reach its maximum of development without interfering in any way with the development of any of the others,—each in turn being so gracious (one might almost say) that, however vigorous might be its own growth, it could not allow itself to overshadow its neighbours or otherwise aggrandize itself at their expense. It is owing to the all-pervading presence of this subtle virtue that in Christ, alone among men, we have faith without dogmatism, enthusiasm without fanaticism, strength without violence, idealism without visionariness, naturalness without materialism, freedom without license, self-sacrifice without asceticism, purity without austerity, saintliness without morbidity, a light which was too strong to dazzle, a fire which was too intense to flame. The inward harmony of his nature was, in fine, perfect: the various tendencies held each other in check, and yet all energized freely, happily, and fully. But the quality which made this inward harmony possible, the “sweet reasonableness” which, as we have seen, descended through all the strata of his being—showing itself in one as serenity of soul, in another as lofty common sense—was

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itself an outflow from the purest of all fountains, from the springs of imaginative thought. It was Christ's grand idea that Nature in general, and human nature in particular, is potentially divine; it was this idea embodying itself, as it were, in his personality, which made that personality so fundamentally charitable, and therefore so sympathetic, so many-sided, so harmonious, so "sweetly reasonable," so transcendently serene. It follows that the man who cannot assimilate that central idea cannot really converse with Christ. The quality which gave tone and character to all the other qualities, the spiritual atmosphere of Christ's personality, is hidden from him, and the qualities that he can see—the innocence of the helpless Babe, the meekness, the patience, the self-sacrifice of the Thorn-crowned Man—are seen amiss, owing to their not being seen in their true proportions and their true light. The Babe and the Thorn-crowned Man, much as they have done for Humanity, have by no means counter-balanced the demoralizing influence of the materialistic ideas which Christendom borrowed from Israel when it rejected (all unconsciously) the spiritual ideas of Christ.

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But however inadequate and one-sided has been the intercourse which we Christians have held with the personality of Christ, the fact remains that we have been deeply influenced by it, and that through its medium the germs of Christ's ideas have found their way into our hearts. When our thoughts, pursuing their own independent path, have brought us face to face with Christ's dominant ideas, the germs which are slumbering in our hearts will begin to evolve their own hidden life. Then a great and salutary change will come over our relations to Christ. For as we become able to commune, more or less consciously, with his mind, our subconscious intercourse with his personality will become clearer, freer, wider, more consistent, and more harmonious ; and this, again, will react upon our intercourse with his mind, making it more comprehensive, more subtle, and more sympathetic than before.

What can we of the present generation do to hasten the coming of that happier day ? One thing, at least. We can lift from the face of Christ the mask of *supernatural* divinity with which theology has invested it. To believe

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that Christ is supernaturally divine is to assume by implication that every word which he spoke was divinely true. This assumption necessarily diverts our attention from the spirit to the letter of Christ's teaching—the sympathetic interpretation of the former being, for obvious reasons, incomparably more difficult than the quasi-logical treatment of the latter—and so makes it impossible for us to hold conscious intercourse with his mind. The unhappy belief that the words of Christ, taken sentence by sentence, are a storehouse of “theological information,” instead of being, in their general tenour, a perennial source of spiritual inspiration and guidance, has interposed itself as an impenetrable barrier between the thought of Christendom and the thought of Christ.

Let us go back a little, and see how this belief came to establish itself among us and obsess our minds.

The Western world owes to Israel one incalculable debt. He stamped on its thought and conscience the grand idea that to subordinate the individual to the Universal Will is the first duty of man. A truly grand idea; but how miserably did Israel himself interpret it!



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We shall never measure to the full the harm that Israel has done to the thought and conduct of the West by his audacious assumption that the Universal Will found adequate expression—at any rate so far as it bore on human life—in the Law of Moses. Christ came into the world to redress this wrong, to call us back to the high-road into which Israel had led us, and from which he had then led us astray. Christ taught us to identify the Universal Will with the general course of Nature—not of physical Nature only, though that, too, is within its limits divine—but of Nature on all its planes and in all its powers and dimensions. He taught us this; and he taught us, more especially, that what is real and central in human nature is the expression of the Divine Will; that the Law of God—the All-Father—is written in promise and potency in man's heart; that to find the true self and follow its guidance is both to obey the voice of God and to make that voice our own. Christ taught us these things, and we felt that he taught with authority. What response did we make to his teaching? In the doctrine of the Incarnation—the cardinal doctrine of Christian theology—the current of

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Western thought touched for a moment the truth of things, as Christ had revealed it, touched it, lingered near it, eddied round it,—and then swept far away from it. What Israel did to the idea of submission to the Divine Will, Christendom did to the idea of the immanence of the Divine Will in Nature. In each case a great spiritual idea was localized, particularized, materialized, de-naturalized, degraded, in response to the average man's instinctive requirements; degraded to the level of the vulgarity of his thought, the timidity of his desire, and the infirmity of his will.

So long as it is allowed to remain in the atmosphere of poetic thought and feeling, the idea of the Incarnation (with the derivative idea of the indwelling Spirit) thrills and glows with spiritual truth, being, in fact, but one aspect of Christ's master idea that God is the life and soul of Nature. That man has *seen* Divinity in Christ; that generation after generation has looked into those eyes of transparent purity and radiant love, and has *felt* that they were and are divine;—is an argument to which, if it were advanced with a due sense of its

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limitations, there would be no effective reply. For, has man's insight deceived him? Is his feeling false to fact? We cannot answer these questions. We cannot weigh things without scales, or measure them without a rule. The fact, the phenomenon of man's faith in Christ, is a legitimate starting-point, and one from which insight and imagination might travel far in the direction of a just conception of God and Man. But the argument is one which, for obvious reasons, theology is afraid to employ. To admit that man, the natural man, is able to discern Divinity when he sees it; to admit that purity and love, through whatever eyes they may glow, are "notes" of the Divine;—were to undermine the very foundations of supernaturalism. And so theology has withdrawn the idea from the realm of poetry, and has turned its wisdom into foolishness by affiliating it to the aridly prosaic philosophy of Israel, and enshrouding it in a fog of pseudo-scientific thoughts and words. The "great dilemma"—that Christ was either an impostor or the "Only begotten Son of God"—with which theologians try to disarm their opponents, is one of the fruits of that

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fatal dualism which has riven the world into Nature and the Supernatural. As a serious argument it is not worth discussing, for it obviously "begs" all the questions which are really (though not ostensibly) in dispute; in other words, it bases itself on assumptions which no one who was not already "orthodox" would dream of granting. It is possible for us to determine whether the primrose does or does not belong to the order of *Rosaceæ*; for we know that the *Rosaceæ* possess certain typical characteristics, and we can easily see whether the primrose possesses these or not. In other words, we can apply the general idea of the *Rosaceæ* to the specific case of the primrose. But we cannot deal similarly with God and Christ. We cannot apply the general idea of Deity to the specific case of Christ's personality; for, apart from our inability to penetrate the depths of Christ's inner life, it is obvious that we do not know—that, in the nature of things, we can never hope to know—what are the typical characteristics of God. Dilemmas, in the logical sense of the word, are unknown in the region of poetic truth. To disconnect this or that

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saying of a poet-prophet from the general tenor of his teaching, to limit it when thus isolated to one only of its many meanings, and on the basis of this de-vitalized form of words to construct an elaborate system of quasi-philosophical thought, is surely the most uncritical and unsympathetic of all attempts to interpret a great man's mind. The dream of arriving at ideal truth by such a method is of all dreams the vainest. One might as well try to convert a gleam of sunshine into a formula, or to build a syllogism on the sweep of the winds or the roll of the sea.

But the real, the final reason why the idea of the Incarnation has been de-naturalized and de-spiritualized by the interpreters of popular thought, is that the demand which the idea makes upon the soul that accepts it is one to which the average man is too timid and too indolent to respond. Theology teaches us that Christ bore the burden of our sins for us when he hung upon the cross, and that we are ever adding, retrospectively, to the weight of guilt that oppressed him. In this, as in most matters, theology has led us astray. The real burden which we Christians have laid, and

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still lay, upon Christ, is not the burden of our sins, but of our potential divinity. Christ came into the world to tell us that we are all sons of the all-loving Father, and therefore of the same royal line as God Himself. The response of Christendom to this message has been the renunciation in favour of Christ and on behalf of Humanity of man's title to the divine throne. "Ye are children of God," said Christ. "Bear yourselves accordingly. Become what ye are—divine." "We are men, and intend to remain men," is the reply which those who call themselves Christians have ever given to this summons from on high. "You and you only are divine. Do for us what we cannot and will not do for ourselves. Take our sins away from us; open the door of Heaven to us, and save us, in spite of ourselves, *from without.*"

The supernatural world is doomed. The floods have risen and are already beating against it. Inward, outward, from deep to deep, from height to height, from plane to plane, from world to world, Nature expands unceasingly before our eyes; and we need not be gifted with prophetic vision to see that,

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sooner or later, her limits will become commensurate with those of the Universe. There was a time when every operation of Nature was attributed to the direct action of a supernatural deity.<sup>1</sup> Beliefs of this order belong to the remote past, and the modern votary of the Supernatural can afford to smile at them. But the ground on which he himself stands is crumbling beneath his feet. There are many phenomena—earthquakes, eruptions, storms, floods, droughts, famines, pestilences, diseases, and the like—which were ascribed, even in recent years, to supernatural agency, but which are now admitted to come under the control of Nature's laws. To this progressive extension of the frontiers of Nature and progressive recession of the frontiers of the Supernatural, there is no imaginable limit. Like an enchanter's palace, like the cloud-mountains of a summer

<sup>1</sup> It may well be that there are mighty spiritual beings in existence, as much in advance of us, *in the present stage of our development*, as we are of the least and lowliest of the "beasts that perish;" and it may well be that these august personalities play a vital part, undreamed of and unimaginable by us, in the direction of the affairs of the Universe. But they do so (we may rest assured) as children of Nature; and the laws that they administer and obey are to the full as natural as those under which we live.

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day, the whole supernatural world is fading away before our eyes into the "formless void" of non-existence. And as it is with Nature—the macrocosm—so it is with that which is "at once its witness and its counterpart," the being of man. We are at last beginning to realize that the range of human nature is illimitable, that the depths of the "buried life" are unfathomable, that the possibilities of man's development are infinite. Nor will the expansion of Nature in the life of man carry with it any change in her identity. The process of growth, far from making the thing that grows unworthy of the name that it bears, does but bring it nearer to its true self, to what it really is. If it is Nature that makes us hunger and thirst after meat and drink, it is Nature also—a higher development of Nature, and as such *more* worthy of the name—that makes us hunger and thirst after righteousness, that inspires the Poet and the Prophet, that gives high courage to the Hero, and singleness of heart to the Saint. If this is not so, one can but ask whereabouts in man's complex nature is the "great gulf fixed" which separates Nature from the Supernatural.



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There are two ways, and two only, by which man may hope to possess himself of the inmost truth of things. He may wait for a message to come to him from beyond the limits of Nature. He has waited long for such a message, but to no purpose ; for every sound that seems to come to him from the other world is really the echo of his own cry for help and guidance. Or he may strive to penetrate the deeper secrets of Nature by the use of those higher faculties—some awake and active, others as yet latent and quiescent—which are truly divine because they are essentially human. The hour is approaching when he will realize, once and for all, that the “truth of things” is at the heart of Nature, and is therefore to be won, not by passive expectation, not by indolent submission to self-constituted authority, but by the stress of spiritual effort, by living up to truth’s high ideal, by secretly assimilating its subtle essence, by growing into oneness with its hidden life,—for the “truth of things” is God Himself. When that “great day” comes, Christ, the thinker and the prophet, will have entered into possession of his Kingdom ; the idea of the Incarnation will have fully disclosed its

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inner meaning ; and the restoration of God to Nature will be complete.

It is conceivable that a hundred thousand years hence (more or less) the inhabitants of this planet will know as little about our religion as we know about the religions of the dwellers in Atlantis (let us say) or any other submerged land. It is conceivable that the very name of Christianity, that the very name of Christ, will have passed away. But the world, one may well believe, will be more Christian then than it is now. For through all those years the stream of Christ's spiritual influence will have continued to deepen and widen. Or, to use one of his own metaphors, the seed which he sowed, and which is still buried in the soil, will have expanded into a branching tree. I have elsewhere allowed myself to wonder whether Christ, as he hung upon the Cross, looked forward, beyond the centuries of apparent failure, to the ultimate triumph of his ideas. I cannot but think that he did. His faith in the ideas for which he lived and died must have inspired him with the conviction that they would never pass away ;

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and his firm grasp of the great law of spiritual evolution must have made him realize that only by growing and expanding can an idea continue to exist. But if he did look forward to the eventual fulfilment of his cherished dream, how great must have been his consolation! Fame means nothing to those who take an inward view of life, for they see that at best it is but the symbol of intrinsic worth. The prospect of being worshipped as a supernatural Deity would have shocked and distressed one who had devoted his life to undermining the foundations of supernaturalism. But the prospect of adding his personal influence to the great natural forces which are making for the evolution of the human spirit would surely have thrilled his heart with a wave of sacred joy.

There are deeper and truer records than any that history (as we understand the word) can decipher or preserve,—inward and spiritual records which are implicit in the soul-life of Humanity, and which unfold themselves from epoch to epoch as the spirit of man evolves and expands. In this, the only Book of Life, the only scroll which immortalizes those who

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are enrolled on it, the name of Christ, whether it be remembered or forgotten by our descendants in the far-off future, will be written for ever in letters of living light.

THE END

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